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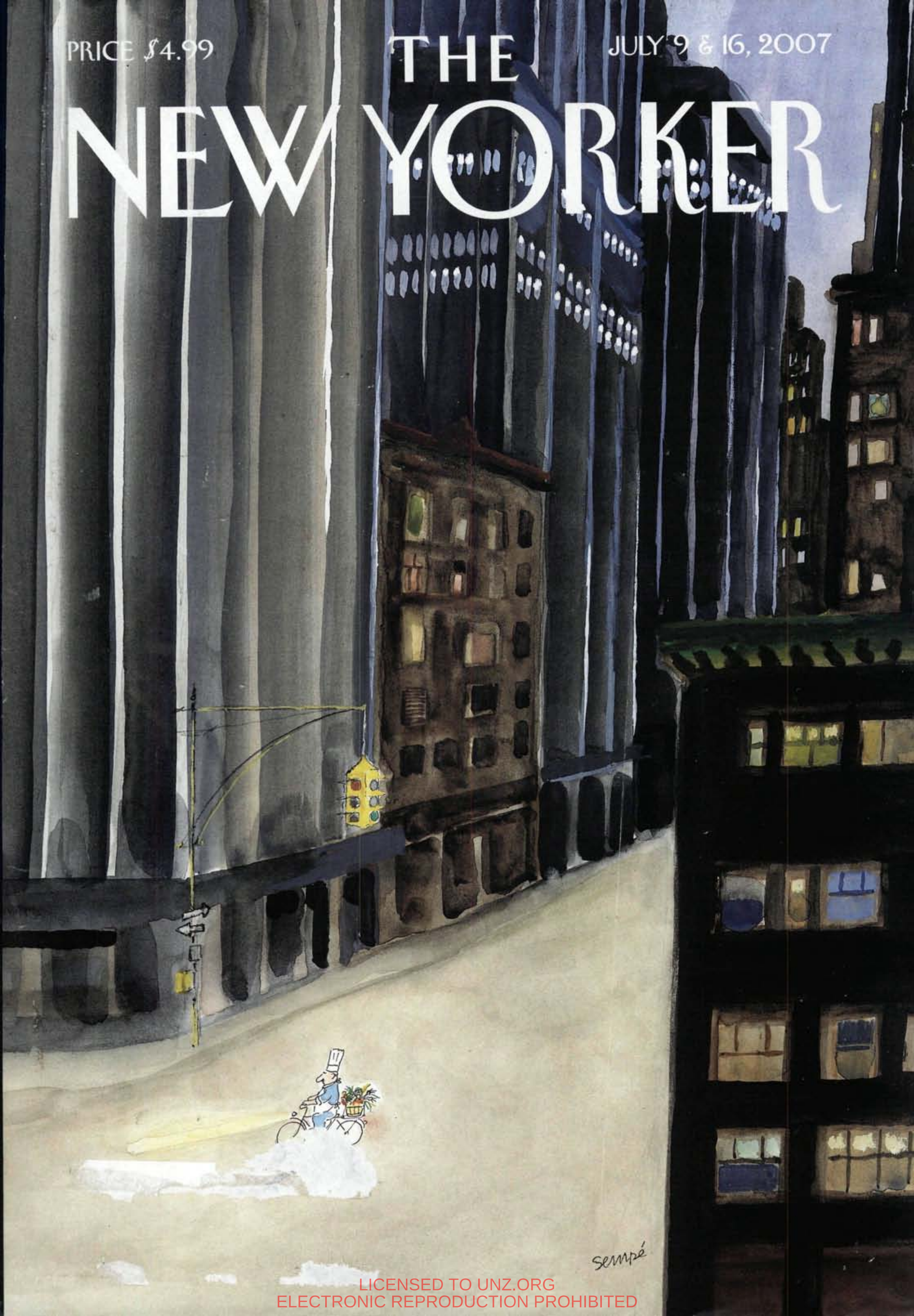
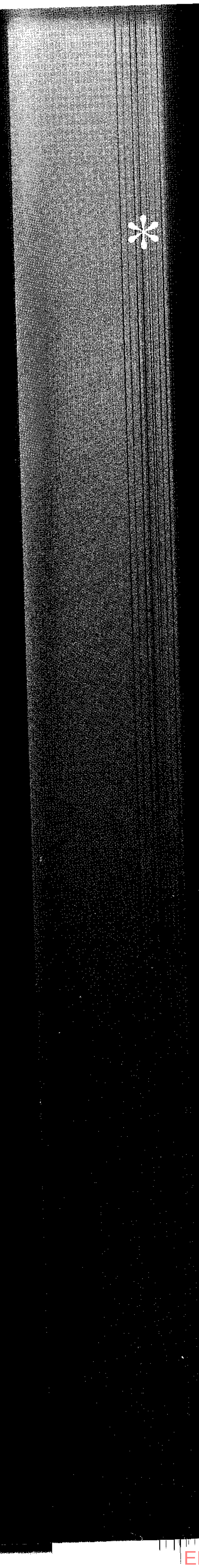
JULY 9 & 16, 2007





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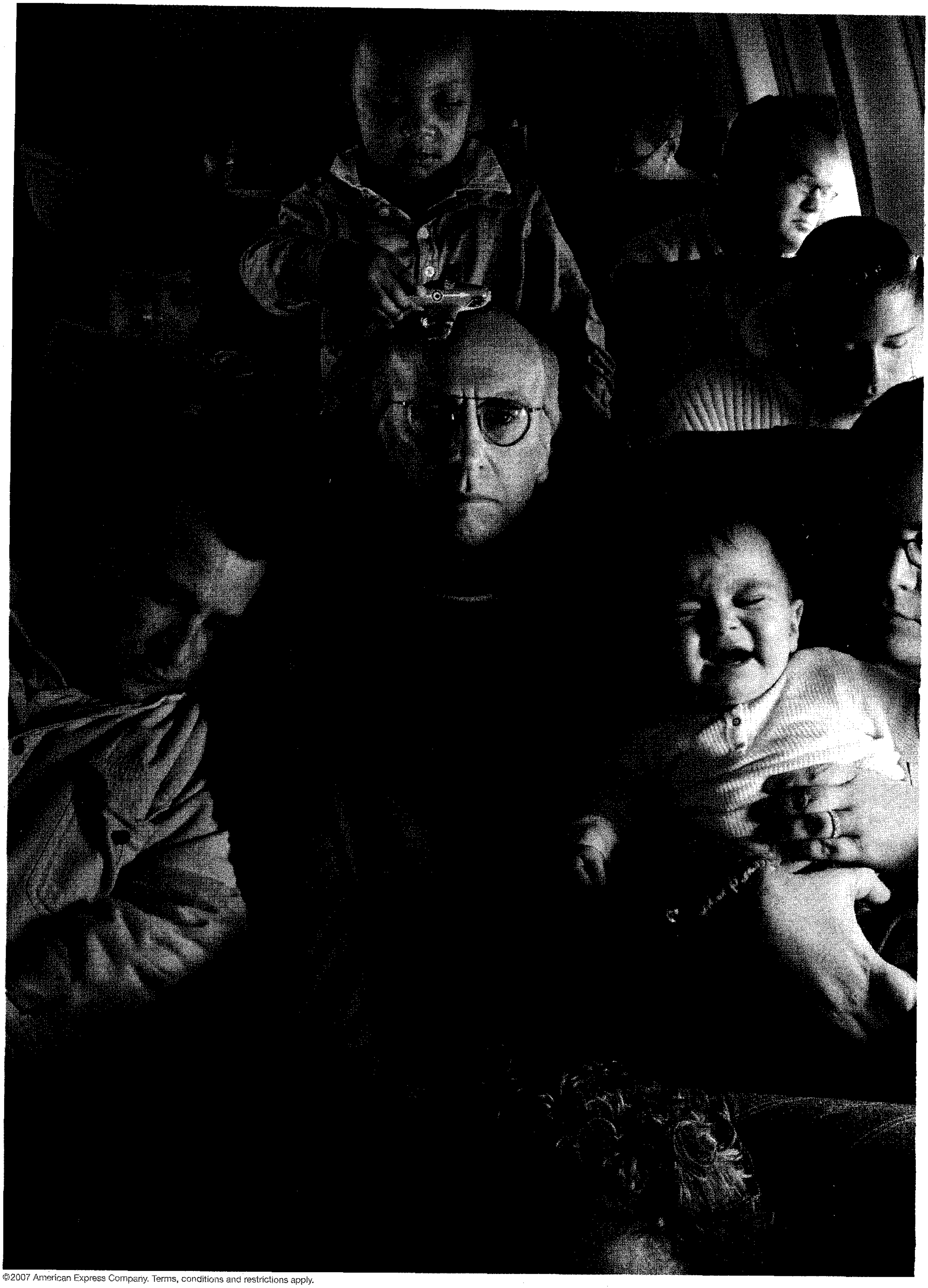

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THE NEW YORKER

JULY 9 & 16, 2007

10 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN
35 THE TALK OF THE TOWN
Hendrik Hertzberg on Cheney's hubris;
James Surowiecki on prediction markets.

David Sedaris 42 REFLECTIONS
This Old House
Living in a world of antiques.

Orhan Pamuk 48 PERSONAL HISTORY
Forbidden Fare
When hot dogs came to Turkey.

Alex Ross 51 A CRITIC AT LARGE
Apparition in the Woods
The music of Sibelius.

Jon Lee Anderson 60 LETTER FROM AFGHANISTAN
The Taliban's Opium War
An ambush in the poppy fields.

Ian Frazier 72 OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS
On Impact
A meteorite mystery in New Jersey.

Stuart Dybek 80 FICTION
"If I Vanished"

THE CRITICS

BOOKS

Louis Menand 88 *Bryan Caplan's "The Myth of the Rational Voter."*
91 Briefly Noted
Tim Parks 92 *Lucy Riall's "Garibaldi."*

Hilton Als 98 THE THEATRE
"Old Acquaintance," "Romeo and Juliet."

Anthony Lane 100 THE CURRENT CINEMA
"Transformers," "Rescue Dawn."

POEMS

Clive James 68 "Sunday Morning Walk"
Jean Sprackland 94 "Hands"

COVER *"Fresh Produce," by J. J. Sempé* DRAWINGS *Jack Ziegler, Charles Barsotti, Paul Noth, Bruce Eric Kaplan, Leo Cullum, Michael Crawford, P. C. Vey, David Sipress, Danny Shanahan, Drew Dernavich, J. Dator* SPOTS *Laurent Cilluffo*

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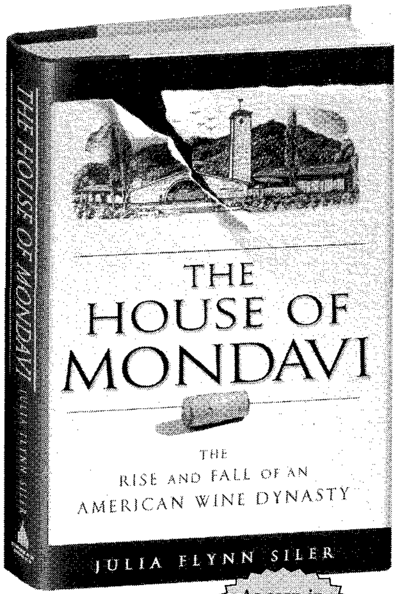

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Ian Frazier ("On Impact," p. 72) is working on a book entitled "Travels in Siberia."

Clive James (Poem, p. 68) has written fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. A book of his essays, "Cultural Amnesia: Necessary Memories from History and the Arts," came out in March.

Stuart Dybek (Fiction, p. 80) is writer-in-residence at Northwestern University. "I Sailed with Magellan" is his third work of fiction.

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Tim Parks (Books, p. 92), a novelist, translator, and essayist, is professor of literary translation at I.U.L.M. University, in Milan. His most recent book is "Medici Money." His next novel, "Cleaver," comes out in the fall.

Jean Sprackland (Poem, p. 94) is the author of two collections of poems, "Tattoos for Mothers Day" and "Hard Water."

J. J. Sempé (Cover) recently published four illustrated books, including "Sunny Spells" and "Mixed Messages."

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

An audio interview with *Jon Lee Anderson* about Afghanistan, and photographs from Uruzgan Province by *Aaron Huey.* / Interesting Times, a new blog by *George Packer.* / A gallery of *Tom Bachtell* portraits of George W. Bush. / From the archives: *Jon Lee Anderson* on Hamid Karzai, *Daniel Zalewski* on Werner Herzog, *Alex Ross* on Sibelius, and more. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events. / Coming next week: *James Surowiecki* on what pirates can teach corporations, and *Donald Antrim* reads a *Donald Barthelme* story on the monthly fiction podcast.

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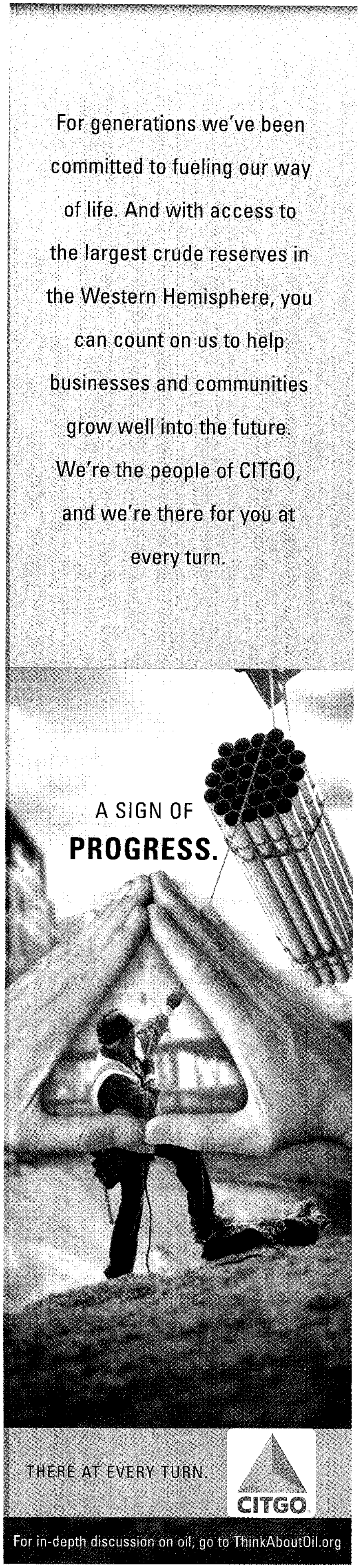

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FOR THE RECORD

Your profile of Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa contained inaccurate references to my client, Keith Brackpool, C.E.O. and chairman of Cadiz Inc. ("Fault Lines," by Connie Bruck, May 21st). Mr. Brackpool never "pleaded guilty to securities fraud in England." Rather, in 1983 he admitted that as the principal of a small London-based company he had engaged in securities dealing without the proper license, and that the company had failed to file required disclosures during 1978-80. As a result, Mr. Brackpool paid a three-thousand-dollar fine. These charges were expunged in 1988.

Elsewhere, the article suggests that Mr. Brackpool was promoting "a California water-storage scheme that could have brought him hundreds of millions of dollars if the state had approved it." This so-called "scheme" actually involves a scientifically based water-management arrangement between Cadiz and the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, not Mr. Brackpool personally. Cadiz's suit against the Water District over its failure to complete the environmental-review phase of the project and accept a federal right-of-way is slated to go to trial this fall. Federal agencies have endorsed the project's benefits, and California has never disapproved the project.

Harry W. R. Chamberlain II
Los Angeles, Calif.

ACCESSIBLE ARCHIVES

As the head of Modern Literary Manuscripts at the British Library and so, in a sense, a homologue of Thomas Staley, I read D. T. Max's article on the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, at the University of Texas at Austin, with interest, and not a little eyebrow-raising ("Final Destination," June 11th & 18th). There is no question that institutions such as the Ransom Center have done a fantastic job of preserving literary archives and manuscripts, often those of British writers. However, I do find that the article highlights several differences between the collecting practices of, say, the Ransom Center and European national libraries. The delight that Professor Staley takes in spiriting material out of the country—or buying material sight unseen—is infectious but is wholly foreign to our way of working, where an awareness of the need for due diligence inherent in publicly funded institutions is paramount. The ways in which we share our material with all communities is one of the British Library's greatest strengths: not just scholars but schoolchildren engaged in workshops or tourists taking advantage of our exhibition spaces. Naturally, whether in Texas or in London, our duty is to preserve authors' archives in perpetuity, but it's a sense of why we keep this material and what we do with it that I found strangely absent from Staley's comments.

Jamie Andrews
London, England

According to Max, Staley "believes, quoting Matthew Arnold, that 'the object as in itself it really is' can never be replaced by a digital reproduction." It's true, of course, that nothing compares with holding the letters that Joyce wrote to friends or poring over the physical drafts of Don DeLillo's "Underworld," but the aim of digitization is not to replace physical artifacts but to supplement them. Right now, the archives are a symbol of information élitism—to view those documents you first have to get to Austin and then get entrée to the Ransom Center's archives, making those original documents impossible to view for vast numbers of people. Digitization democratizes that information by making it viewable to anyone who can find an open Internet connection. The process is meant to make as much information as easy as possible to obtain, and I think that is a rather wonderful thing.

Jon Jeffryes
Madison, Wis.

•

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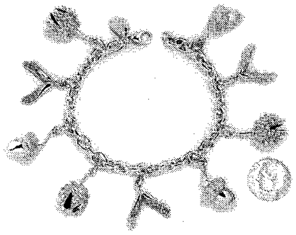

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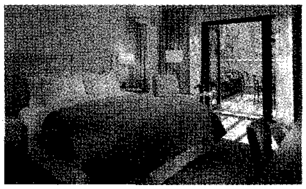

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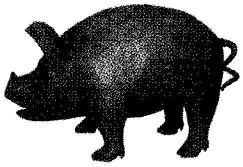

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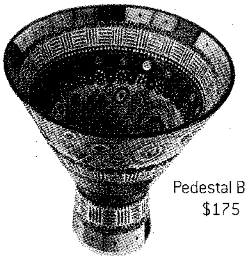

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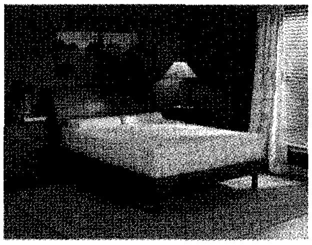

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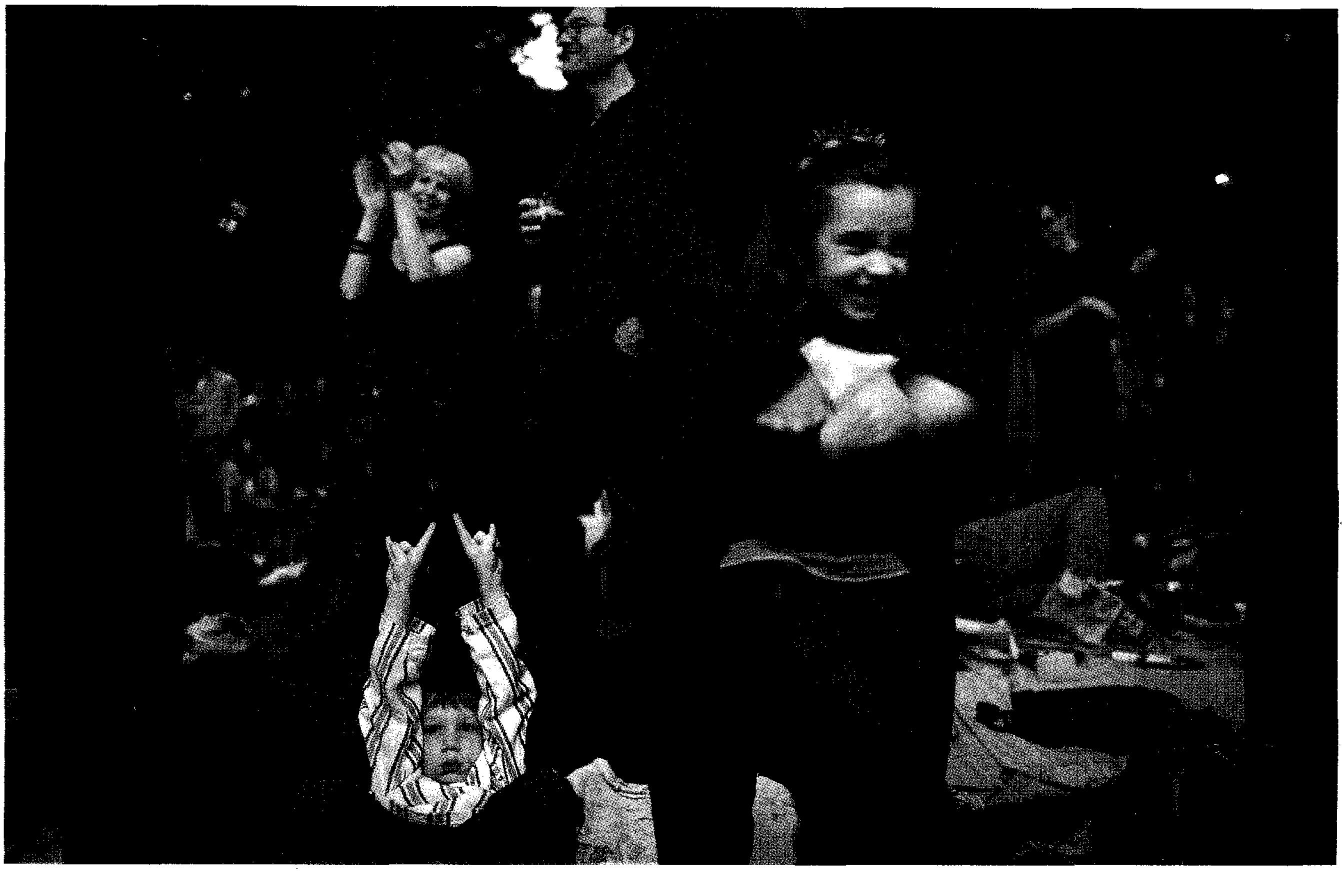

Celebrate Brooklyn!, in Prospect Park. Photograph by Landon Nordeman.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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			4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17				

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE

ROSE GARDEN

Patti LuPone follows in the illustrious footsteps of Ethel Merman, Angela Lansbury, and Bernadette Peters as she takes on the role of the formidable Mama Rose in the Stephen Sondheim-Jule Styne musical "Gypsy," which she also performed last summer at Chicago's Ravinia Festival. The Encores! production, at City Center, also stars Boyd Gaines, with direction by Arthur Laurents, who wrote the original book for the musical in 1959. (See page 12.)

NIGHT LIFE

INDEPENDENTS' DAY

The Vancouver indie-rock collective the New Pornographers brings its triumphant hooks, glittering harmonies, and boundless enthusiasm to Battery Park for a free Fourth of July concert. (See page 16.)

ART

ABSTRACT THINKING

New York's galleries are filled with photography right now, most of it related to the Magnum Festival and the sixtieth anniversary of that coöperative. "Concrete Works," a show at Mitchell-Innes & Nash in Chelsea that focusses on the nonrepresentational, takes another tack, mixing abstract photographs by the likes of Walead Beshty and James Welling in with paintings and sculptures. (See page 20.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

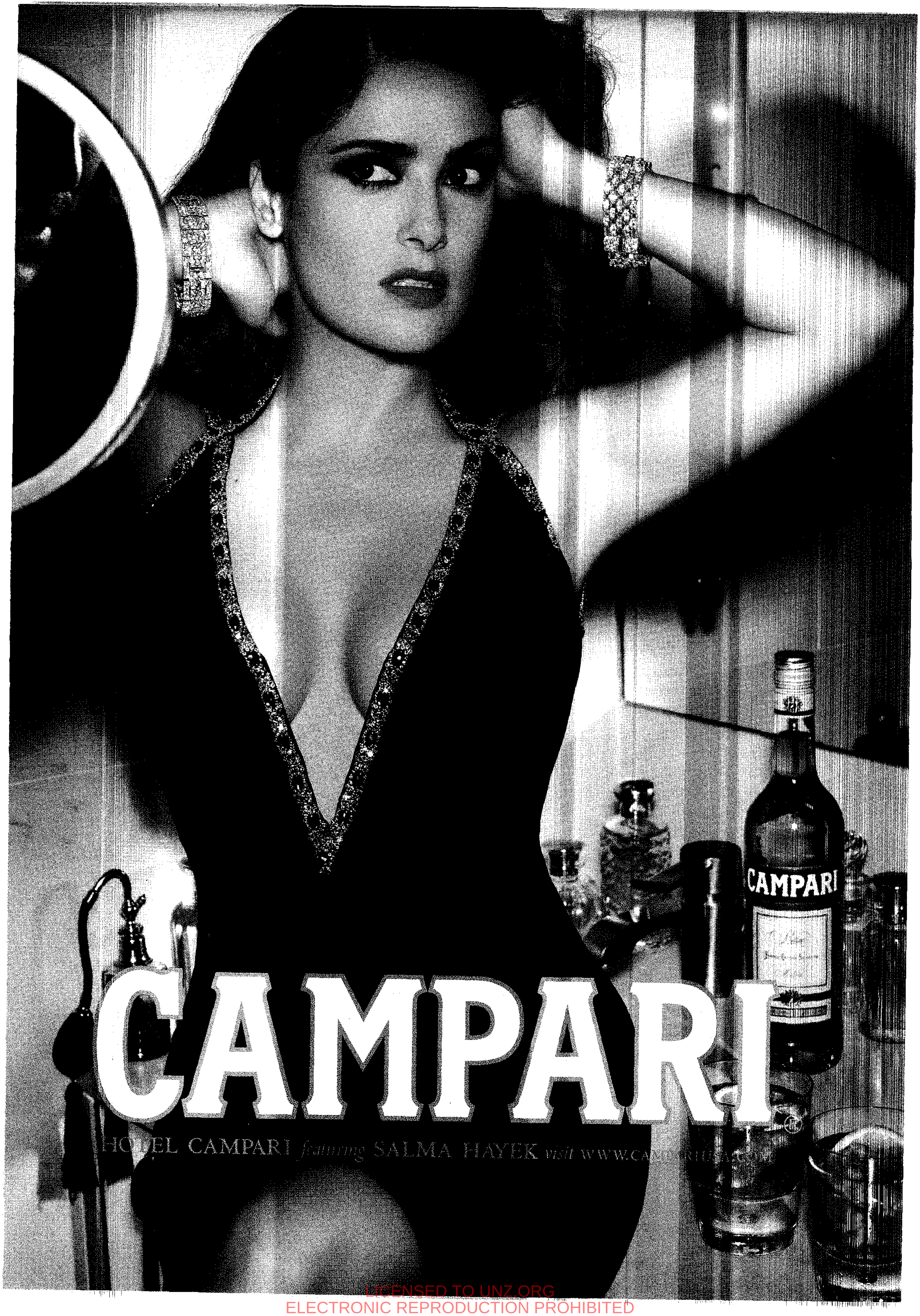
RUSSIAN RING

The Kirov Opera's staging of Wagner's four-part "Ring des Nibelungen," a jewel in this year's Lincoln Center Festival, features not only the commanding conductor Valery Gergiev but a production inspired by ancient Russian folk imagery. (See page 24.)

MOVIES

WOMEN'S WORLD

The documentary filmmaker Jennifer Fox, finding herself single, pregnant, and confused in her forties, took to filming her life and that of the women she knew, in New York and around the world. The disarmingly intimate result, "Flying: Confessions of a Free Woman," runs six hours. Many of the screenings at Film Forum will be followed by discussions with the director. (See page 26.)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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
GOTTA DANCE

Apart from certain African companies, the Royal Danish Ballet, from Copenhagen, is the one troupe most likely to make you want to dance in the aisles. Though it is the second-oldest ballet company in the world, R.D.B. didn't come to America until 1955, when Ted Shawn, the founder-director of Jacob's Pillow, forked over ten thousand dollars to import ten of the Danish dancers, for a presentation that he called "the apex of our achievement" at the dance festival in the Berkshires. This year is the Pillow's seventy-fifth anniversary. Appropriately, the Danes will appear there again, starting on July 11. The prime creator of R.D.B. was the nineteenth-century ballet master August Bournonville. He taught the company its distinctive style—one part bounce, one part steel. This season, the Danes will bring some modern works, but the meat of the show will probably, as always, be the Bournonville material: the pas de deux and tarantella from "Napoli" (1842), the pas de deux from "Flower Festival at Genzano" (1858), and the cute, raffish "Jockey Dance" (1876).

DANIEL STOLLE

—*Joan Acocella*

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ABSINTHE
Set amid the mirrors and billowing velvet of the Spiegeltent, this burlesque show includes aerialists, contortionists, and "the wealthiest man in Armenia." In previews. Opens July 10. (South Street Seaport, Pier 17. 212-279-4200.)

ANGRY YOUNG WOMEN IN LOW-RISE JEANS WITH HIGH-CLASS ISSUES
A new comedy, written and directed by Matt Morillo, examines the psychology of savvy young urban women. Opens July 12. (Players Theatre, 115 MacDougal St. 212-352-3101.)

THE BLACK EYED
A new play by Betty Shamieh, about four Arab women from different eras who meet in the afterlife. Previews begin July 17. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

EAST TO EDINBURGH
Twelve American shows on their way to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe play here first. Opens July 10. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

ELECTION DAY
Josh Tobiessen wrote this dark satire of political campaigns. Jeremy Dobrish directs. Previews begin July 16. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 212-246-4422.)

FABLES DE LA FONTAINE
Robert Wilson directs this Comédie-Française production, complete with animal masks and a Michael Galasso score, derived from the works of the French poet Jean de La Fontaine. Part of the Lincoln Center Festival. In French with English supertitles. July 10-15. (Gerald W. Lynch Theatre, 899 Tenth Ave. 212-721-6500.)

GEMELOS
Compañía Teatro Cinema presents this adaptation of a novel by Agota Kristof, about twin brothers living through a war, as part of the Lincoln Center Festival. In Spanish with English supertitles. July 10-14. (Pope Auditorium, Fordham University, 113 W. 60th St. 212-721-6500.)

GUILTY
Nancy Manocherian wrote this drama, about a high-society clique in New York. In previews. Opens July 5. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

GYPSY
Encores! presents Patti LuPone in the 1959 Sondheim-Styne musical. Arthur Laurents directs. Previews begin July 9. Opens July 14. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

ICE FACTORY '07
The Ohio Theatre hosts the SoHo Think Tank's annual festival of new work presented by companies such as New Georges and Rindfleisch. Opens July 4. (66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444.)

IDOL: THE MUSICAL
A new musical about small-town teen-agers who are obsessed with Clay Aiken. Daniel Tursi directs. Previews begin July 5. (45th Street Theatre, 354 W. 45th St. 212-868-4444.)

THE LAST YEAR IN THE LIFE OF THE REVEREND DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
Waterwell premières this rock musical, drawn from King's speeches, writings, and interviews. Directed by Tom Ridgely. In previews. Opens July 7. (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200.)

MY FIRST TIME
Four actors relate stories about losing one's virginity, adapted and directed by Ken Davenport (who co-conceived "Altar Boyz"). Previews begin July 12. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE PEOPLE VS. MONA
A musical murder mystery set in small-town Georgia, by Jim Wann and Patricia Miller. Previews begin July 12. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

SUMMER PLAY FESTIVAL
This annual festival presents sixteen plays from up-and-coming playwrights. Opens July 10. (Theatre Row, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

SURFACE TO AIR
David Epstein's drama, about the family of a soldier in the Vietnam War whose remains are found thirty years after he was declared M.I.A. James Naughton directs. Previews begin July 11. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400.)

XANADU
Douglas Carter Beane wrote the book for this stage version of the movie from 1980, about a roller-skating muse in Venice Beach. Kerry Butler stars. In previews. Opens July 10. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

DARK OF THE MOON
In 1945, Howard Richardson and William Berney's Appalachian tale about a witch boy named John, who impregnates a pretty mountain gal, opened on Broadway, but chances are that show didn't much resemble this raw, physical, and psychedelic production by Thirsty Turtle. In the tale, John (Noah Dunham) convinces the local conjure woman to give him a shot at being human—she agrees, but only if he can capture his girl's love for one year. The cast keeps the stage humming with rough-hewn banjo tunes, playing their roles with a mix of sincerity and scenery-chewing camp. The striking patchwork puppets with primitive, folk-art-style faces are by Dakotah West. (Chashama, 217 E. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through July 7.)

EURYDICE
Sarah Ruhl's luminous retelling of the Orpheus myth from his beloved wife's point of view is exhilarating. The lovers Orpheus (Joseph Parks) and Eurydice (Maria Dizzia) are sitting on a beach; then Eurydice is enticed by a Nasty and Interesting Man (Mark Zeisler), who claims to have a letter from her deceased father, and she wanders off. Her disappearance turns out to be from life itself. In Hades, her consciousness is leached of the past; when, at first, Eurydice fails to recognize her father (Charles Shaw Robinson), it's as if we were gazing at the shadows of a grief beyond language. The singular, surreal world of the play is as lush and limpid as an anxiety dream of love and loss, in which both author and audience swim in the magical, sometimes menacing, and always thrilling flow of the unconscious. (Reviewed in our issue of 7/2/07.) (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

GONE MISSING
"You lose something in New York, it don't come back." This homespun adage begins the Civilians' documentary-theatre piece, based on interviews conducted by the troupe and compiled by Steven Cosson, which captures the funny and inescapably poignant details that emerge when you ask people about the things they've lost. Among them: a shoe, a cell phone, an Agnès B. scarf, body parts, memory, virginity, Atlantis, a necklace handed down from a disapproving mother, a Palm Pilot dropped in the panic of 9/11. The stories are punctuated by genre-hopping songs by Michael Friedman, and the actors—six of them, in snappy gray suits—provide evocative characterizations in quick succession, insuring that the variations-on-a-theme approach never gets old. (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200.)

NO END OF BLAME
In this literary drama from 1981 by Howard Barker, a Hungarian cartoonist, Bela Veracek (Alex Draper), and his friend Grigor (Christopher Duva) are soldiers in the Carpathian mountains at the close of the First World War. Both have artistic aspirations, but it's the caustic Bela who is able to translate the horrors of war and the stupidity of governments into accessible, astute newspaper cartoons. He quickly grows disenchanted with the excesses of Soviet statehood and heads to England, only to find a parallel censorship within Churchill's regime. While the play is ambitious and vaguely Stoppardian in its reach, this stilted production, directed by Richard Romagnoli, doesn't develop the kind of forceful rhythm that would be necessary to sustain such a lengthy and complex work. (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 800-838-3006. Through July 13.)

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OLD ACQUAINTANCE
Margaret Colin and Harriet Harris star in a revival of John Van Druten's comedy from 1940. (Reviewed in this issue.) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

POLITICS OF PASSION
Three early works by the film director Anthony Minghella, directed by the Potomac Theatre Project's Cheryl Faraone, reveal a propensity for surprisingly static monologues that tend to isolate the characters from one another in gelid space. Time hangs heavily, even in "Cigarettes and Chocolate," the richest and fullest of the three pieces. A sensitive young woman, Gemma (a fine Cassidy Freeman), becomes preoccupied by a Tibetan monk who set himself on fire, ostensibly to protest human-rights abuses. In a parallel gesture that doesn't quite add up, Gemma refuses to speak—in a remonstrance to the unrelenting selfishness of those around her. It's a potentially intriguing device, but there's a lack of dynamism in the realization. (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 800-838-3006. Through July 14.)

ROMEO AND JULIET
Michael Greif directs this Shakespeare in the Park production. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-539-8750. Through July 8.)

OUT OF TOWN

BARD SUMMERSCAPE
Back by popular demand, Ken Roht and his Orphean Circus headline the Spiegeltent, opening July 5. Gregory Thompson directs "Saint Joan," George Bernard Shaw's 1923 portrait of Joan of Arc, opening July 12. (Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900.)

BAY STREET THEATRE
The world première of "Turandot: The Rumble for the Ring," a rock-musical adaptation of the opera set in the world of professional wrestling, by Diane Paulus and Randy Weiner. Opens July 10. (Sag Harbor, N.Y. 631-725-9500.)

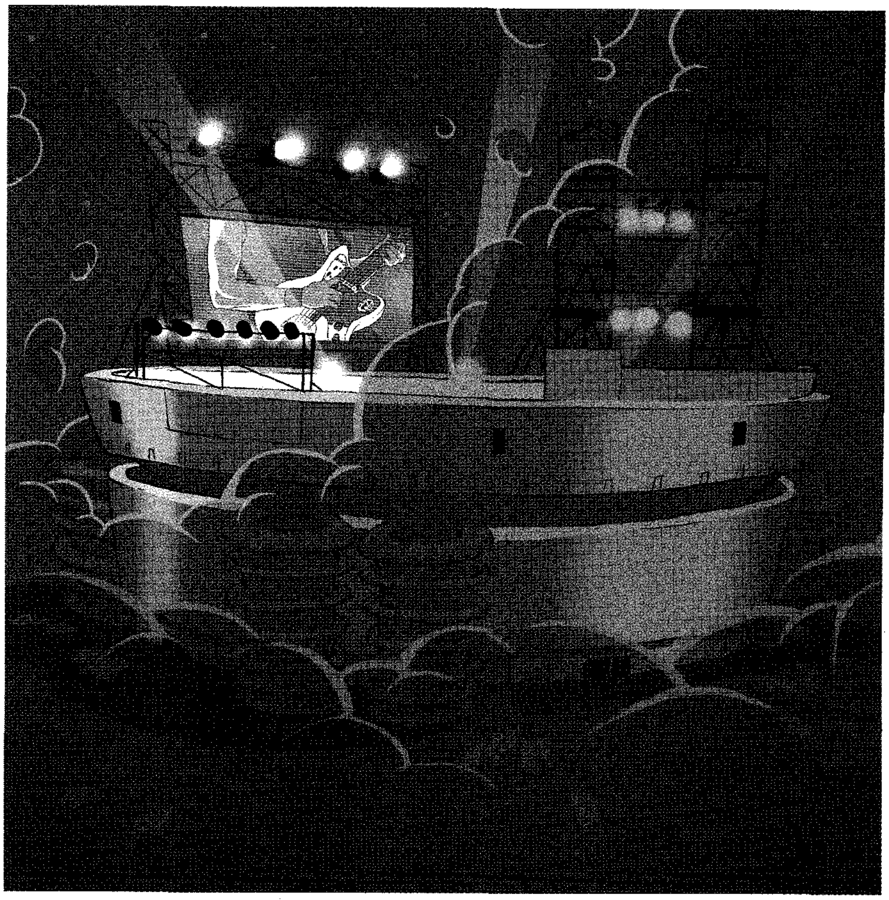
BERKSHIRE THEATRE FESTIVAL
On the Main Stage, Terrence McNally's "Love! Valour! Compassion!" closes July 7, and Rick Cleveland's one-man show "My Pal George" continues its run. Eric Hill directs Dale Wasserman's adaptation of Ken Kesey's novel "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," which starts previews July 10 and opens July 13. For more information, visit www.berkshiretheatre.org. (Stockbridge, Mass. 413-298-5576.)

HUDSON VALLEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
On the tented outdoor stage at Boscobel, "Richard III," directed by Terrence O'Brien, plays in repertory with "As You Like It," directed by Kurt Rhoads. For more information, visit www.hvshakespeare.org. (Garrison, N.Y. 845-265-9575.)

WILLIAMSTOWN THEATRE FESTIVAL
"Dissonance," by Damian Lanigan, starring Alicia Witt, closes July 8, and "The Front Page," starring Richard Kind and Wayne Knight, runs July 4-15. "Villa America," by Crispin Whittell, has its première, opening July 11. For a full schedule, visit www.wtfestival.org. (Williamstown, Mass. 413-597-3400.)

Also Playing

AVENUE Q: Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BEHIND THE LID:** Silver Whale gallery, 21 Bleecker St. 212-868-4444. Through July 7. **THE BRIG:** Living Theatre, 19-21 Clinton St. 212-352-3101. Through July 8. **A CHORUS LINE:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COLOR PURPLE:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **CURTAINS:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **DEUCE:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE DROWSY CHAPERONE:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100. **ESCAPE FROM BELLEVUE:** Village Theatre, 158 Bleecker St. 212-307-7171. **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY: THE ROAST OF UTOPIA:** 47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **FROST/NIXON:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **GASLIGHT:** Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. Through July 8. **GREY GARDENS:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **110 IN THE SHADE:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200. **IN A DARK DARK HOUSE:** Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200. Through July 7. **INHERIT THE WIND:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Through July 8. **LEGALLY BLONDE THE MUSICAL:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100. **MARY POPPINS:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4747. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **10 MILLION MILES:** Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200. Through July 15. **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE:** Circle in the Square, 50th St. between Broadway and Eighth Ave. 212-239-6200. **THE YEAR OF MAGICAL THINKING:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.



"Live Earth," the concert with a conscience, takes place at Giants Stadium.

TOMER HANUKA

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—July 8: The "Summer Slaughter" tour brings together **Necrophagist, Cattle Decapitation,** the **Faceless, As Blood Runs Black, Cephalic Carnage,** and other not so cuddly favorites for a high-decibel evening of death metal. July 15 and July 17: An aging rock fan's dream come true, the "Classic Rock Cares" benefit shows find the veteran howler **Brian Johnson** and the bassist **Cliff Williams,** of AC/DC, teaming up with the Grand Funk Railroad front man, **Mark Farner,** the erstwhile Rainbow and Deep Purple vocalist **Joe Lynn Turner,** and members of the band that backed the late Who bassist John Entwistle when he performed on his own, for a night of fist-pumping favorites in the name of music education. July 16: Atlanta's **Arrested Development** wraps an earthy message of righteous positivity in a melodic strain of hip-hop. The band rose to prominence in the early nineties on the strength of its sunny début album, "3 Years, 5 Months and 2 Days in the Life of," but, despite their penchant for big radio hooks and their enlightened outlook, the hits dried up.

BLENDER THEATRE AT GRAMERCY
127 E. 23rd St. (212-307-7171)—The **Book of Knots,** a local studio-based enterprise founded by the multi-instrumentalists Matthias Bossi, Joel Hamilton, and Tony Maiome, takes a hard-edged approach to high-concept art rock. With a collective résumé that includes Skeleton Key, Sparklehorse, and Pere Ubu, the principal members have a broad range of experience, making it easy for them to turn an album about the decline of the Midwestern manufacturing base (their latest record, "Traineater") into a varied and challenging listen. They're also able to attract the support of such indie icons as Tom Waits, Mike Watt, and Jon Langford, all of whom appeared on their new release. On July 13, they play their first and perhaps only live show, joined by a number of guests from the record.

CANAL ROOM
285 West Broadway (212-941-8100)—The tabla player **Suphala,** who studied under the masters Ustad Allarakha and Ustad Zakir Hussain, takes her instrument deep into the pop realm. Early in her career, she toured with Perry Farrell, and she's played with everyone from Norah Jones to Vernon Reid (both of whom appeared on her début album, "The Now," two years ago). Her latest album, "Blueprint," includes a contribution from **Edie Brickell,** and she will be among the performers here as Suphala celebrates its release on July 10.

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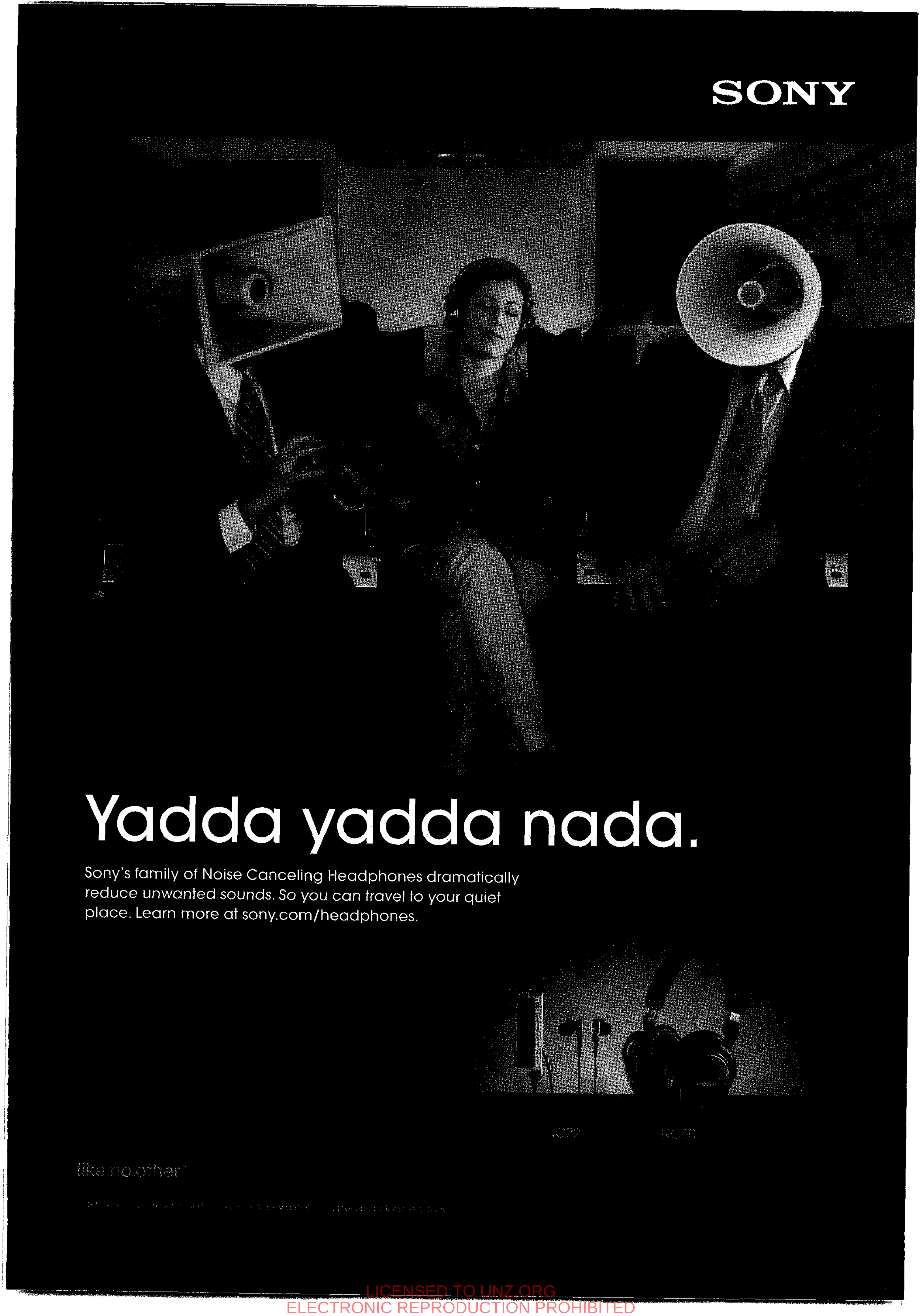

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CELEBRATE BROOKLYN!
Prospect Park Band Shell, Prospect Park W. at 9th St. (718-855-7882, ext. 45)—July 13: The Latin Alternative Music Conference (see below) brings in three acts with a Spanish-language connection—the Mexican rockers **Zoé** and **Chetes** and the d.j. duo the **Pinker Tones,** from Barcelona. July 15: **Frank London's Yiddish Carnival** features the Klezmatics stalwart and a host of other musicians.

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. (212-360-2777)—July 11: **Femi Kuti,** the son of the Afrobeat innovator Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, and his band Positive Force. With the d.j. and spoken-word artist **Rich Medina.** Note: The performance will be followed by a screening of "Music Is a Weapon," the 1982 documentary about Fela Kuti. July 14: A Latin Alternative Music Conference (see below) show with **Café Tacuba, Pacha Massive,** and **La Sista.** July 15: An afternoon of hip music for children, with **Sippy Cups** (psychedelic rock from Los Angeles) and **Hip-Hop Harry** (a live version of the television show featuring a rapping yellow bear).

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—July 10: **Dolores O'Riordan,** late of the nineties alternative-pop band the Cranberries, returns with material from her solo début album, "Are You Listening?" Stripped of the rock excesses of the Cranberries' later work, O'Riordan's most recent material revels in lushly plangent melancholy.

GIANTS STADIUM
The Meadowlands (212-307-7171)—July 7: The **"Live Earth"** concert. The promoters, who include Al Gore, want this seven-continent, twenty-four-hour gathering to "trigger a global movement to solve the climate crisis," according to the event's Web site, www.liveearth.org. They've gotten a number of sterling performers for the New York portion, including **Afi, Akon, Alicia Keys,** the **Dave Matthews Band, Fall Out Boy, John Mayer, Kanye West, Kelly Clarkson, KT Tunstall, Ludacris, Melissa Etheridge, Bon Jovi, Roger Waters, Smashing Pumpkins,** and the **Police.** At the very least, expect the show to trigger a substantial traffic jam, situated as it is in a stadium with very limited mass-transit options.

THE HOOK
18 Commerce St., Red Hook, Brooklyn (718-797-3007)—July 13: **Young Jessie,** a Los Angeles-based vocalist who once sang with the Coasters and the Flairs and whose contributions to the R. & B. cannon include "Hit, Git and Split," "Shuffle in the Gravel," and "I Smell a Rat," makes his first New York City appearance in nearly half a century. He'll be joined by the legendary R. & B. figure the **Mighty Hannibal.** The fine local act the **Dansettes** will provide the backing for both and will perform a set of their own.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—July 14: The **Loser's Lounge** pays tribute to Serge Gainsbourg. July 17: The downtown cellist **Erik Friedlander** showcases a magnificent new solo album, "Block Ice & Propane," which is inspired by family road trips he took as a child. Friedlander's father, Lee, is a photographer, who, when Erik was young, would pack up his family for long summer treks to photo shoots and teaching assignments in a '66 Chevy pickup with a camper on top and the amenities of the album's title. The beautifully spare compositions vaguely recall Ry Cooder's score for "Paris, Texas" while revealing the cello to be—at least in Friedlander's hands—a versatile instrument that can sound like a steel-string guitar one moment and an air horn the next.

LATIN ALTERNATIVE MUSIC CONFERENCE
Rock, rap, funk, reggaetón, metal, and electronica co-exist comfortably during this music festival–cum–industry summit, which runs July 10-14. Insiders will attend the panel discussions, but music fans and dancers will want to catch the shows. See Celebrate Brooklyn! and Central Park Summerstage for two noteworthy ones. (For more information, visit www.latinalternative.com.)

LINCOLN CENTER FESTIVAL
July 17: The seminal psychedelic-rock band **Os Mutantes,** which is led by the Brazilian brothers Arnaldo and Sérgio Dias Baptista. (Rose Hall, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500.)

RIVER TO RIVER FESTIVAL
July 4: The **New Pornographers,** a collective of musicians from Vancouver whose ranks include the vocalists A. C. Newman, Dan Bejar, and Neko Case. The ideal place to listen to their soaring power pop would be in a convertible on the open road in the summer. The next best thing would be to hear them in Battery Park, where they'll be sure to offer a preview of their forthcoming album, "Challengers." July 11: The cranky guitars, poppy organs, and careful songcraft of Texas's **Spoon.** (Rockefeller Park, Battery Park City.) (For more information, visit www.rivertorivernyc.com.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through July 6: The vocalist **Claire Martin,** a celebrated figure in England. Her new album, "He Never Mentioned Love: Remembering Shirley Horn," is a tribute to the masterly singer.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—July 4-7: The pianist **Hank Jones,** who turns eighty-nine later this month, remains the standard by which mainstream jazz pianists are measured. He's accompanied by the drummer **Omar Hakim** and two fine bassists, **John Patitucci** (on the first three nights) and **George Mraz** (on the last).

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—July 3-8: The actor **Danny Aiello** has shared the screen with both Cher and Madonna, and his vocal talents fall somewhere between those of two Italian-American legends, Frank Sinatra and Tony Danza.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—July 5-8: The caustically brilliant songwriter and eccentric pianist and singer **Mose Allison.** Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—July 5-8: **Mulgrew Miller,** as dependable a post-bop pianist as can be found, adds the trumpeter **Duane Eubanks** to his polished trio. July 11-15: **Jason Moran** and the Bandwagon, which is **Tarus Mateen,** on bass, and **Nasheet Waits,** on drums. Moran shakes up the traditional concept of the piano trio by incorporating hip-hop rhythms, recorded samples, and other post-modern ploys and embracing a repertoire that ranges from music by the stride pianist James P. Johnson to the compositions of the Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev. July 16: The drummer **Ignacio Berroa,** a first-rank musician's musician, fronts a quartet.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Led by the keyboardist **Nik Bärtsch,** the Swiss quartet **Ronin** audaciously mixes jazz, funk, minimalism, and touches of world music. It makes its U.S. début here on July 3.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—July 2-8: **Anat Cohen,** an ambitious and skilled saxophonist and clarinet player, brings in her big band on Monday night to sub for the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra (which is taking the month off; the club will be closed on subsequent Mondays in July), and she finishes off the week in the company of a quartet. July 10-15: The master drummer **Paul Motian** is here with his Trio 2000 + Two.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Poiret: King of Fashion,"** a survey of the career of the Pa-

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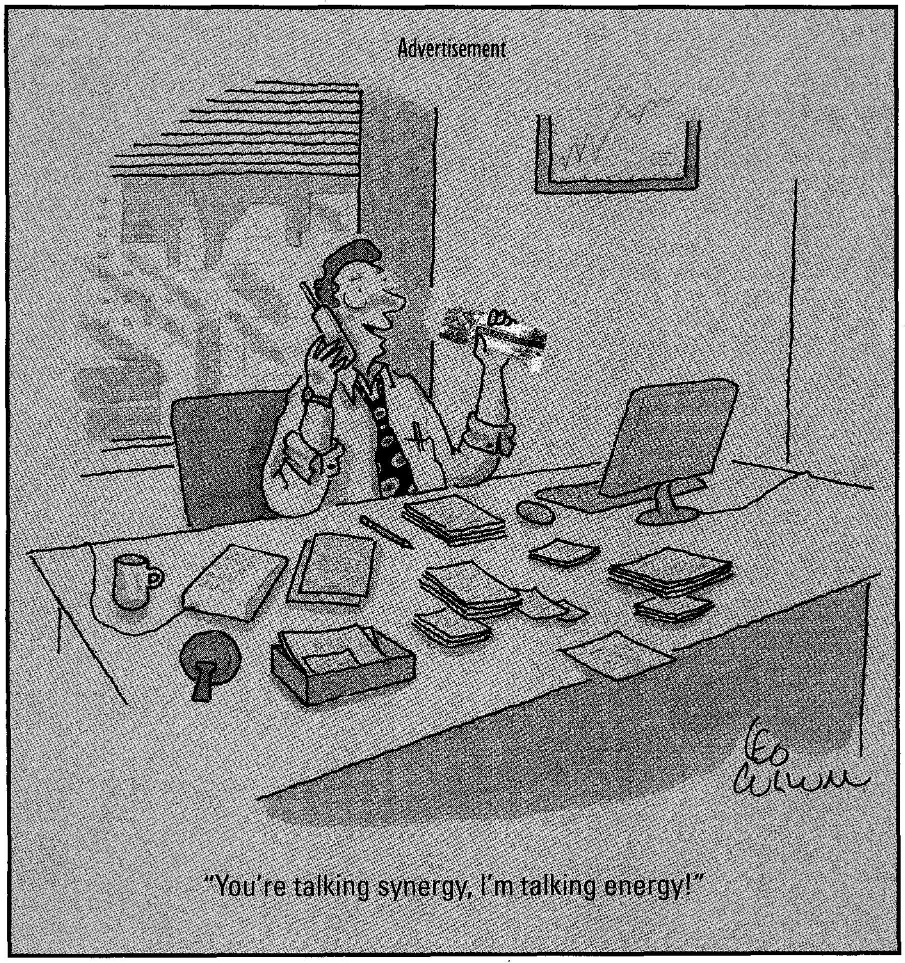

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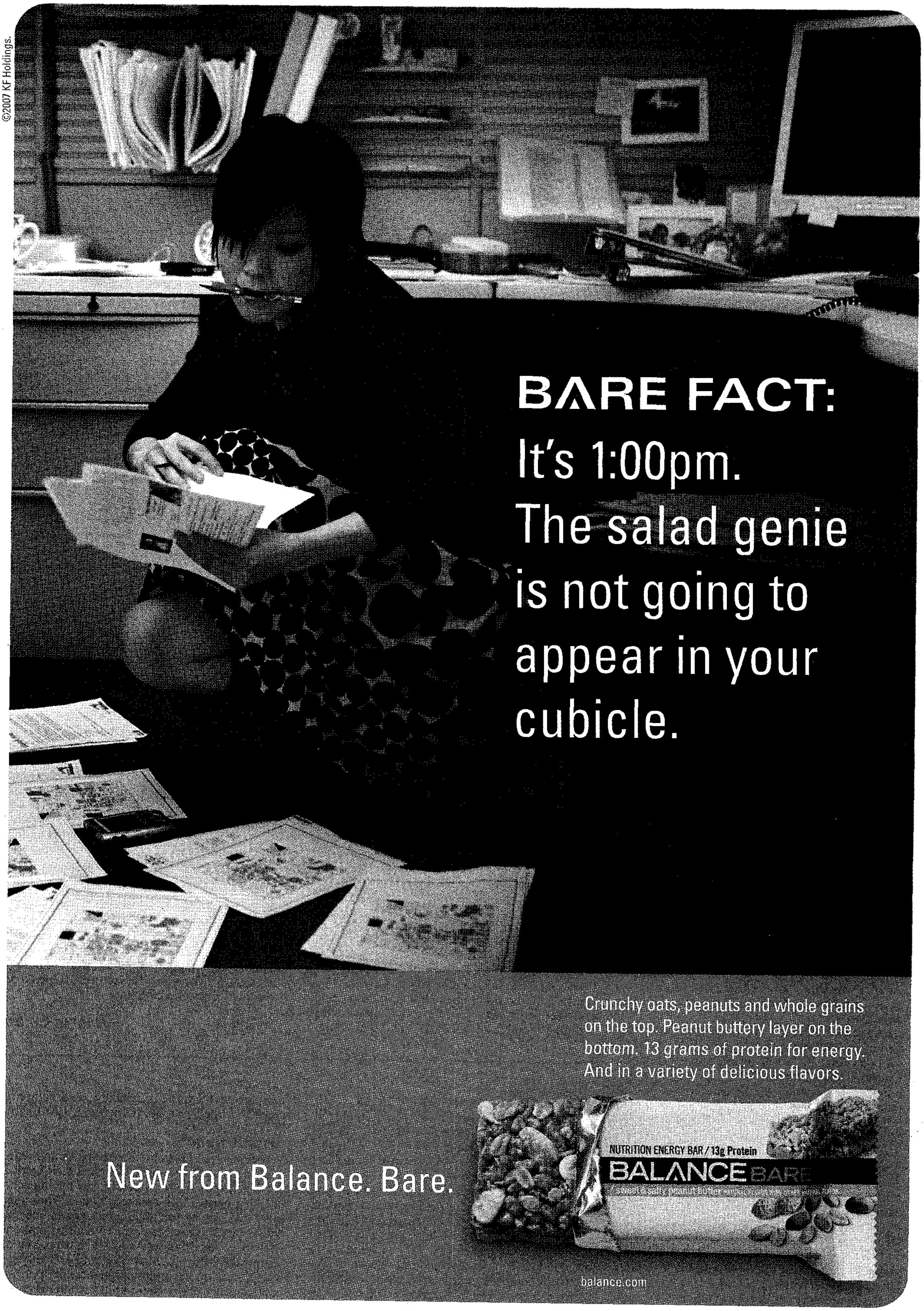

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risian designer Paul Poiret (1879-1944), is at the Costume Institute through Aug. 5. ♦ **"Neo Rauch at the Met: Para"** presents new paintings by the Leipzig-based artist. Through Oct. 14. ♦ **"Impressionist and Early Modern Paintings: The Clark Brothers Collect."** Through Aug. 19. ♦ **"Frank Stella on the Roof."** Through Oct. 28. ♦ **"Frank Stella: Painting Into Architecture"** presents the prolific artist's designs for architectural structures. Through Aug. 5. ♦ **"Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797."** Through July 8. ♦ **"One of a Kind: The Studio Craft Movement."** Through Sept. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Richard Serra Sculpture: Forty Years."** Through Sept. 10. ♦ **"Picasso's 'Demoiselles d'Avignon' at 100."** Through Aug. 27. ♦ A primer on the minimal and post-minimal line in all its severe glory, **"Lines, Grids, Stains, Words"** begins with a drawing by Ellsworth Kelly from 1949 and ends with another by Martin Creed from 2004. In between, the focus is on the sixties and seventies (with a flareup in the nineties). Examples of art made by women in periods usually considered to have been dominated by men are notable; works on paper by Eva Hesse, Yayoi Kusama, Jo Baer, Anne Truitt, Dorothea Rockburne, Hanne Darboven, Agnes Martin, Howardena Pindell, Roni Horn, Elena del Rivero, Adrian Piper, and Cady Noland stand side by side with pieces by the likes of Donald Judd and Mel Bochner, Rudolf Stingel and Mark Lombardi. Through Oct. 22. ♦ **"Automatic Update"** collects five technologically oriented installations made since 2000 by Cory Arcangel, Jennifer and Kevin McCoy, Paul Pfeiffer, Xu Bing, and Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. Through Sept. 3. ♦ **"Projects 85: Dan Perjovschi."** Through Aug. 27. ♦ **"Barry Frydlender: Place and Time."** Through Sept. 3. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8. The museum will be open until 9 on Thursday evenings through Aug. 30, except July 12.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—The telescoping spiral of Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim rotunda is in the midst of a summerlong restoration, so it's a timely moment to consider how geometry sculpts the void. **"The Shapes of Space"** culls works from the permanent collection and will evolve over the summer, moving upward as the renovation progresses. Through Sept. 5. ♦ **"Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum: Restoring a Masterpiece."** Through July 8. ♦ **"Divisionism/Neo-Impressionism: Arcadia and Anarchy."** Through Aug. 6. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Rudolf Stingel."** Through Oct. 14. ♦ **"Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era."** Through Sept. 16. ♦ **"Lincoln Kirstein"** honors the late, great aesthete, connoisseur, and impresario on the centenary of his birth, with an exhibition of work by artists he championed, including Walker Evans, Elie Nadelman, and Pavel Tchelitchew. Through Aug. 27. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Gold."** Through Aug. 19. ♦ **"Mythic Creatures: Dragons, Unicorns, and Mermaids."** Through Jan. 6. ♦ The recently opened Anne and Bernard Spitzer Hall of Human Origins explores the science of evolution. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

DRAWING CENTER

35 Wooster St. (212-219-2166)—**"Gego: Between Transparency and the Invisible."** Through July 21. ♦ **"William Anastasi: Raw."** Through July 21. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY

1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Biographical Landscape: The Photography of Stephen Shore, 1969-79."** Through Sept. 9. ♦ **"Let Your Motto Be Resistance: African-American Portraits."** Through Sept. 9. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"The Sculpture of Louise Nevelson: Constructing a Legend."** Through Sept. 16. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"From Berlin to Broadway: The Ebb Bequest of Modern German and Austrian Drawings."** Forty-three drawings and watercolors dating from the early twentieth century, from the collection of the lyricist Fred Ebb, who left them to the Morgan upon his death, in 2004. Through Sept. 2. ♦ **"Federico da Montefeltro and His Library."** Through Sept. 30. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"Facing Fascism: New York and the Spanish Civil War."** Through Aug. 12. ♦ **"The *Jewish Daily Forward:* Embracing an Immigrant Community."** Through Sept. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—**"The World of Asher B. Durand: The Artist in Antebellum New York."** Through Sept. 30. ♦ **"A New Light on Tiffany: Clara Driscoll and the Tiffany Girls."** Through July 22. ♦ **"New York Divided: Slavery and the Civil War."** Through Sept. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER

22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Organizing Chaos."** Through Sept. 24. ♦ **"Peter Young: 1963-1977."** Through Sept. 24. ♦ **"Linder."** The collage artist Linder Sterling—known by her first name only—hails from the U.K., where in the seventies she designed album covers for bands like the Buzzcocks and other affiliates of the legendary Manchester label Factory Records (she also sang in her own band, Ludus). She thus arrives for her first U.S. exhibition trailing clouds of coolness. One admits reluctantly that the work—some of which is recent—looks pretty dated. Soft-core-porn nudes are overlaid with roses or cameras or home appliances, ads are defaced with smeared lipstick, and so forth. Historically minded punk mavens will appreciate the flyers and other print ephemera, and the film clip of Linder performing with Ludus in 1982, in riotous party dress and dark eyeliner, rocks. Through Sept. 24. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Summer-hours warning: Many galleries are open Mondays through Fridays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6. Others follow the normal Tuesday-to-Saturday schedule. It's best to call ahead.

ROSWELL ANGIER

Angier, whose previous show in this space focussed on the denizens of Boston's gritty Combat Zone, is clearly drawn to the dark end of the street. These black-and-white photographs were made in the course of several visits to Gallup, New Mexico, and other towns bordering on the Navajo Nation between 1978 and 1982. Included are several bleak roadside landscapes, but more often Angier's subjects are Native American men who look dazed, bloated, and far older than their years. The drunk Indian is an awful cliché, but Angier's pictures are apparently as painful to him as they are to viewers. As in the work of Danny Lyon, there's no sense of hit-and-run exploitation here, just a mixture of tenderness, concern, and righteous anger. Through July 28. (Gitterman, 170 E. 75th St. 212-734-0868.)

"21 POSITIONS"

Very few of the Austrian photographers and video-makers gathered here have exhibited their work in the U.S. before, so this showcase has the impact of breaking news, much of it quite good. Their positions may not be particularly innovative, but individual pieces are memorable enough to make us want to see much more of Andrea Witzmann, Markus Schinwald, Michaela Moscouw, and Eva Schlegel. Rita Nowak quotes art history in seductive portraits of young men, one nude on a mud-splattered couch.

TABLES FOR TWO

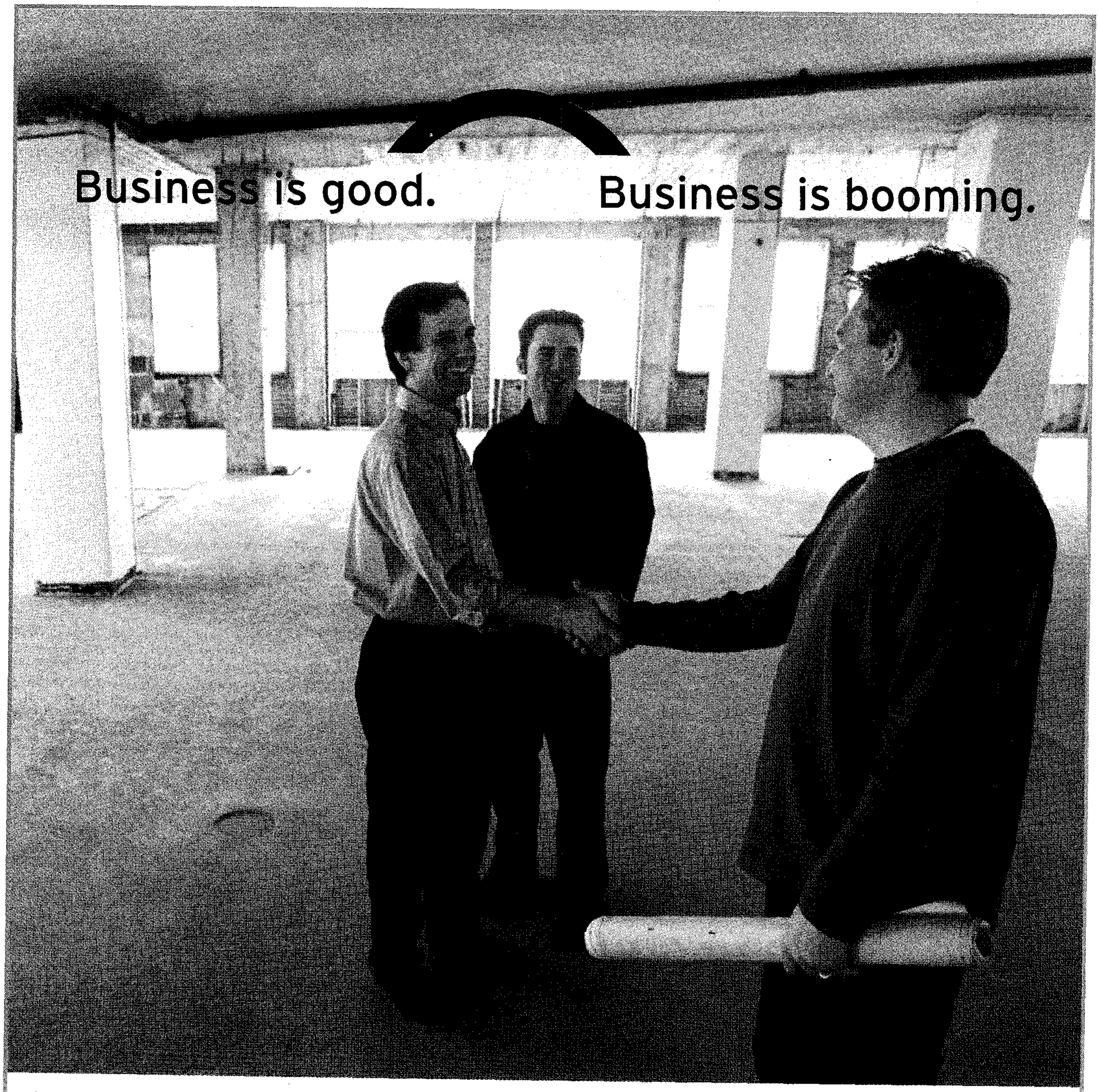
PERILLA

9 Jones St. (212-929-6868)—Yes, Harold Dieterle, a co-owner of Perilla, won the reality-television cooking competition "Top Chef." Smoke and lights, though, aren't much in evidence at Perilla, which melds American and Asian influences to an effect low-key enough to banish any thoughts of Rocco DiSpirito (whose rise and quick fall in his last venture was chronicled on NBC's "The Restaurant"). Even so, Dieterle (along with his partner, Alicia Nosenzo) has a lot to live up to at Perilla—guess who's coming to dinner? The Zagats *and* the Nielsens! He mostly pleases both the foodies and the fans.

There's the location, on a Village side street packed with neighborhood standbys—an understated spot, as if to say, "I'll always remember the little people." The staff go about their business with an informed yet unscripted aplomb, and do the small things right, like allowing customers to transfer their tabs from bar to table without a hassle and presenting each with one slice of brown, crusty bread in lieu of offering an overblown basket. Sometimes the safe quality of the surroundings (fancy light fixtures, framed photographs of clouds and trees that recall those motivational posters that promote "INSPIRATION" or "TEAMWORK") veers into the unmemorable. It's endearing, though, to see Shakespeare's Sonnet CVI hanging on a wall, "just because," as a reservationist said, "the owners liked it."

Production values aside, the food is a hit, with poppingly fresh herbs and vegetables (fiddlehead ferns, water spinach, pea tendrils, Okinawa yams, parsley root) that do more than their usual share of the work. Excepting pork belly and meatballs, the menu is inventive—Dieterle combines ricotta and cherries in a signature salad, offers a wonderful dish of pan-roasted New Zealand langoustines, and garnishes a sautéed skate wing with cabbage slaw and pastrami. (The lemon-fennel doughnuts, though, would be better if they weren't shaped like dice and spongy in the middle.) Two women, long finished, are left alone to linger over their wine. One goes to the bathroom and returns to bemoan flickering candles and an unflattering mirror. "I looked like a German milkmaid crossed with 'The Blair Witch Project'!" That's as close to Hollywood as this place gets. (Open daily for dinner. Entrées $20-$32.)

—Lauren Collins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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
CIAO, BELLISSIMA

THIERRY GUITARD

The "Signore & Signore" season, running at BAM through July 29, is a song of praise to Italian actresses—not just the international bombshells (Sophia Loren, Claudia Cardinale, and Gina Lollobrigida) but also less explosive beauties, such as Alida Valli and Lucia Bosè. "The Lady Without Camelias" (1953), showing on July 13, stars Bosè as Clara, a young actress who is no sooner discovered than she is fenced in and humiliated, with a new husband who cannot tolerate her romantic scenes; he prefers her to play Joan of Arc, with disastrous results. The director is Michelangelo Antonioni, who had already worked with the rapturous Bosè on "Chronicle of a Love Affair" and who offered her the part of Clara after Lollobrigida (and, it is said, Loren) had turned it down. Compared to later Antonioni, the film feels crowded, yet the prowl of his camera is already afoot, and one shot of a car rolling through a fog-dampened evening, with a sign saying "CINEMA" the only illumination, seems to presage and condense his whole career.

—*Anthony Lane*

Clegg & Guttmann, long absent from the New York scene, channel Soutine and Warhol in a pair of perversely chic still-lifes. And Manfred Willmann steals the show with twenty-seven shots from a sequence called "Das Land," on the pleasures and terrors of rural life. Through Aug. 25. (Austrian Cultural Forum, 11 E. 52nd St. 212-319-5300.)

Short List

MIKIKO HARA: Cohen Amador, 41 E. 57th St. 212-759-6740. Through July 21. **DAMIÁN ORTEGA:** Doris C. Freedman Plaza, Fifth Ave. at 60th St. For more information, see www.publicartfund.org. Through Oct. 28.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

EMBAH
Warm, bright colors and spectral faces fill the canvases of the Trinidadian poet and artist Emheyo Bahabba, commonly known as Embah. You might not be familiar with the folklore or the spiritual references (and the gallery doesn't offer much support in this department), but you can still enjoy the works' composition and ethereal mood, which dovetails nicely with contemporary art's (that is, the urban-hipster variety's) current craze for earnest expressionism in all its forms. Embah's sculptures are crafted out of found objects and read almost like tropical versions of Jessica Stockholder or Isa Genzken. At the opening, the sexagenarian artist was playing music on one. (It sounded a bit like a xylophone.) Through July 14. (White Columns, 320 W. 13th St. 212-924-4212.)

ALEX WEBB
Webb, one of the many Magnum photographers exhibiting in town right now, has always emphasized the artful side of photojournalism, and this recent color work from Istanbul is among his best. "Vibrant and melancholy" is how he describes the city; his multilayered photos, with their silhouetted figures, deep shadows, and brilliant light, capture the mood perfectly. Nearly every image is fragmented—broken by mirrors, doors, poles, wires, bodies, reflections—but cleverly resolved. Webb draws us into the theatre of the street the way Helen Levitt and Saul Leiter do, animating every inch of the frame and our imaginations, too. Through July 27. (Sepia, 148 W. 24th St. 212-645-9444.)

"CONCRETE WORKS"
This spare, intelligent exhibition of abstract work in several mediums includes two of the most gorgeous photographs in town. Walead Beshty made them by folding and exposing large sheets of color photo paper, and, at more than six feet tall, his results look like shattered stained-glass panels: faceted, liquid, glowing. Also in the eccentric mix, along with Jessica Stockholder, Man Ray, Lucy McKenzie, and Albert Oehlen, are James Welling, who shows big, elegant black-and-white photos of what appear to be randomly scattered geometric shapes, and the Bauhaus guru László Moholy-Nagy, with a pair of enigmatic color shots from the thirties that hint at the vast unknown just beneath the surface of the material world. Through July 27. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400.)

"DARJEELING"
It seems fitting that Daniel Reich, who started his gallery in a tiny ground-floor apartment on Twenty-first Street, has begun mounting shows in a quirky slip of a room at the Chelsea Hotel. Narrow, with canary-yellow walls and a paint-splattered floor, the space itself could probably tell a few stories. The current show features a couple of young dudes—a current Yale M.F.A. named Mike Smith and Jeffrey Tranchell, from Detroit—who make rough monochrome paintings, tongue-in-cheek still-lifes, and nervy post-minimalist sculpture. It's hard to say whether this young work stands up to the space—but one must admire Reich's verve in mounting a show in a building filled with so many crazy, creative ghosts. Through July 7. (Reich at the Chelsea Hotel, 222 W. 23rd St., Room 227. 212-924-4949.)

Short List

THOMAS FLECHTNER: Boesky, 509 W. 24th St. 212-680-9889. Through Aug. 17. **STUART O'SULLIVAN:** Cooney, 511 W. 25th St. 212-255-8158. Through July 13. **JULIANNE SWARTZ:** Bienvenu, 529 W. 20th St. 212-206-7990. Through July 6. **"COLOUR BEFORE COLOR":** Hasted Hunt, 529 W. 20th St. 212-627-0006. Through July 20. **"EN PLEIN AIR RELOADED":** Black & White, 636 W. 28th St., 212-244-3007. Through July 14.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

YAYOI KUSAMA
Kusama has often flirted with figuration—in painting and sculpture, her proliferating dots and biomorphic oblongs always bear a relation to the body, and fruit and flower shapes arise regularly, too. Abstraction, however, is her natural element. One sees the distinction clearly in this survey of etchings, lithographs, and silk screens dating from 1982 to 2004. Abstract webs of dots and wavy lines are elegant, sexualized, or scatological, both humorous and oneiric, as one would expect. The pictures of fish, pumpkins, butterflies, and so forth are garish kitsch, bringing to mind greeting cards and coffee mugs. Through July 28, then reopening Aug. 21 to Sept. 1. (Peter Blum, 99 Wooster St. 212-343-0441.)

Short List

DAVID LAMELAS: Maccarone, 630 Greenwich St. 212-431-4977. Through July 31. **"BEYOND THE WHITE CUBE: A RETROSPECTIVE OF BRIAN O'DOHERTY/PATRICK IRELAND":** Grey Art Gallery, 100 Washington Sq. E. 212-998-6780. Through July 14.

DANCE

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE
James Kudelka's "Cinderella" closes the Metropolitan Opera House season. The production is an odd mix, combining slapstick comedy, cartoonishly Art Deco sets and costumes, athletic pas de deux, some slightly cheesy special effects, and an earnest "I did it my way" subtext. But it has redeeming moments, such as the scene when Cinderella dances alone at the ball, the ingenious round-the-world search for Cinderella undertaken by the Prince, and, of course, that jazzy, opulent score by Prokofiev. At the July 4 matinée and on the evening of July 7, the expansive, elegant Guillaume Côté, who created the role for the National Ballet of Canada in 2004, performs as a guest alongside the plucky gamine Xiomara Reyes. ♦ July 3 and July 5-6 at 8, July 4 at 2, and July 7 at 2 and 8: "Cinderella." (212-362-6000.)

SAVION GLOVER
"Invitations to a Dancer," the tap virtuoso's engagement at the Joyce, concludes its run. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. July 3 and July 9-10 at 7:30, July 4 and July 11 at 2 and 7:30, July 5-6 and July 12-13 at 8, July 7 at 2 and 8, and July 14 at 2.)

NOCHE FLAMENCA
The beloved Spanish troupe, starring Soledad Barrio, shows flamenco at its intimate, traditional best. (Theatre 80, at 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-352-3101. July 5-6, July 11, and July 13 at 8; July 7 and July 14 at 2 and 8; and July 8 and July 15 at 2 and 5. Through July 29.)

RONALD K. BROWN/EVIDENCE
Brown and his company, Evidence, bring their spiritually rich African-based dancing—always a joy—to Central Park SummerStage's free concert series on a double bill with a hip-hop revue by Gabriel (Kwikstep) Dionisio and Anita (Rokafella) Garcia. (Rumsey Playfield. 212-360-2777. July 6 at 8.)

"SLOW DANCING"
The photographer David Michalek captures a burst of dancing on film, at a thousand frames per second, then plays it back in extreme slow motion,

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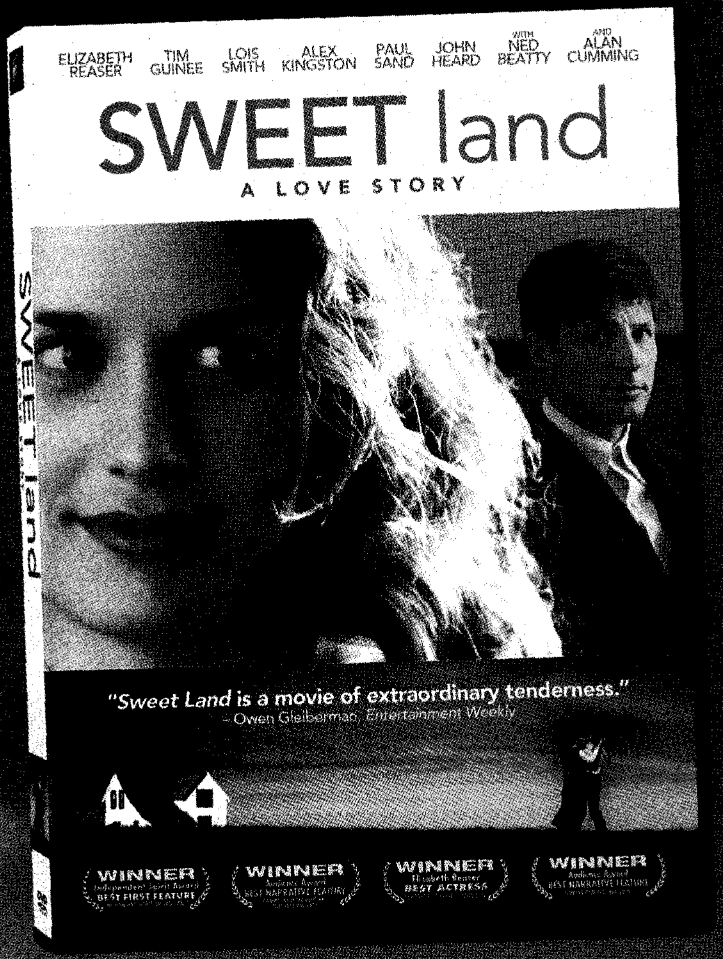
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When a feisty German mail-order bride arrives in Minnesota to marry a young immigrant farmer, they must face stiff opposition from the local minister and strong anti-German sentiment among the townspeople. But significant upheaval within the town itself [illegible] will allow the couple to make a stand for [illegible] their love.

SWEET land

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ON DVD **JULY 10, 2007**

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FAMILY APPROVED

PG FOR BRIEF PARTIAL NUDITY AND MILD LANGUAGE stretching a few seconds of footage across ten minutes. The result is a rare chance to savor details normally too short-lived to study. For the Lincoln Center Festival, forty-two of these films are being projected, in random order, on three forty-foot screens hung across the façade of the New York State Theatre, to be viewed, free, in the Lincoln Center plaza. The juxtapositions should be striking, with masters of ballet, modern, break dancing, tap, capoeira, hip-hop, flamenco, voguing—you name it. (July 10-29 from 9 P.M. to 1 A.M.)

"TAP CITY 2007"
Even with Savion Glover encamped at the Joyce, this festival's variety shows remain the event of the summer for lovers of tap dance. Seven years in, the acts are familiar, but when the usual suspects include Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards and Jason Samuels Smith, who needs new faces? As in the past, each evening is themed: kids, internationals, straight-up tap, and song and dance. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. July 11-14 at 7 and 9:30.)

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW
At the Ted Shawn Theatre July 4-8, Nederlands Dans Theater II, the younger ensemble of the well-established experimental Dutch company, will perform three recent works: Jiří Kyliáns's fluid and mysterious "Sleepless" (2004); the more playful and balletic "Simple Things" (2001), by Hans van Manen; and "Dream Play" (2000), yet another interpretation of Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring," by Johan Inger. ♦ At the Doris Duke Studio Theatre July 5-8, Club Guy and Roni—a Dutch company led by Israeli choreographers—makes its U.S. début with "The Language of Walls," a tedious and portentous exercise for six women, insufficiently leavened with a few bursts of humor and high spirits. ♦ An ensemble of twelve dancers from the Royal Danish Ballet, with its rich tradition of mime and understated virtuosity, appears at the Duke July 11-15. They will perform excerpts from the classics "Napoli" and "Flower Festival at Genzano," choreographed by the company's founder, August Bournonville, as well as his male duet "Jockey Dance," along with "Festival Polonaise," by Harald Lander, and two contemporary works from Denmark. ♦ At the Ted Shawn July 12-15, in "The Other Here," Big Dance Theater masterfully weaves together two Chekhovian stories by the Japanese novelist Masuji Ibuse, scenes taken from an American life-insurance conference, sped-up traditional dances from Okinawa, and a handful of that archipelago's infectious pop songs. (Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. For a complete schedule, visit www.jacobspillow.org. Through Aug. 26.)

BARD SUMMERSCAPE
Of the two dances commissioned by Bard this summer, Doug Varone's "Victorious" is most concerned with the festival's Elgar theme, taking on his Cello Concerto in E Minor, played live in a piano reduction. By turns mournful, comic, and triumphant, the dance indirectly suggests the composer's emotional wounds and recovery following the First World War. Susan Marshall's "Sawdust Palace" includes a few Elgar pieces, but it engages more with the cabaret associations and the in-the-round seating of her venue, the Spiegeltent. Here Marshall pushes her trademark imagistic vignettes in the direction of burlesque—with aerial work, occult overtones, and some inspired deadpan silliness. (Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900. July 5-15. For a complete schedule, visit www.summerscape.bard.edu.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
CONCERTS IN TOWN

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
"Summertime Classics," a series devoted to the kind of once-popular "light" classical music that many orchestras avoid, concludes with a program of Russian gems—works by Glinka, Prokofiev ("Peter and the Wolf," with an engaging narrator, Kevin Kline), Khachaturian, Borodin ("In the Steppes of Central Asia"), and Tchaikovsky (the clangy "Capriccio Italien"); Bramwell Tovey conducts. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. July 5 at 7:30 and July 6 at 8.) ♦ The annual "Concerts in the Parks" series provides big hunks of standard repertory to throngs of outdoor listeners. The first, oft-repeated program features works by Berlioz, Mendelssohn (the Violin Concerto, with Stefan Jackiw), and Tchaikovsky (the "Pathétique" Symphony); Ludovic Morlot, a rapidly ascending young maestro, conducts. (Prospect Park, Brooklyn. July 10. ♦ Great Lawn, Central Park. July 11. ♦ Cunningham Park, Queens. July 12. ♦ Snug Harbor, Staten Island. July 13. ♦ Heckscher State Park, East Islip, L.I. July 14.) ♦ For the grand finale, Andrew Davis, the music director of Chicago's Lyric Opera, conducts a concert in which instrumental music by two great opera composers, Strauss ("Till Eulenspiegel") and Mussorgsky ("Pictures at an Exhibition"), bookends a suite of opera arias by Weber, Massenet, and Catalani (the delectable "Ebben? Ne andrò lontana," from "La Wally") sung by the powerful soprano Measha Brueggergosman. (Great Lawn, Central Park. July 17.) (All concerts are at 8. No tickets required.)

BARGEMUSIC
The schedule at the floating chamber-music series begins with a concert of violin sonatas by Beethoven (including the "Spring") and by Handel, an older master he profoundly admired, performed by the violinist Mark Peskanov and the pianist Jeffrey Swann, both of whom will be featured in the two weeks of concerts to come. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. July 6 at 8. For full listing, see www.bargemusic.org.)

BROOKLYN PHILHARMONIC
As part of Celebrate Brooklyn!, Michael Christie and the borough's band offer a concert balancing Grofé's "Grand Canyon Suite" with "For the Heroes," a post-9/11 double concerto by Mark O'Connor that pairs the composer-fiddler with the char-

An exhibit of the Magnum photographer Alex Webb's images of Istanbul street scenes, including "Altinsehir" (2004), is at Sepia.

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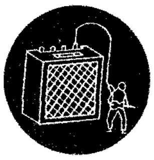
ismatic avant-garde cellist Maya Beiser. (Prospect Park Band Shell. July 14 at 8. No tickets required.) ♦ Note: Christie will also lead the orchestra (with the violinist Lara St. John as its guest) in the first two of four "Eight Seasons" concerts, featuring Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" and Piazzolla's "Four Seasons of Buenos Aires." (South Street Seaport. July 12 at 8. ♦ Brooklyn Bridge Park, Brooklyn. July 13 at 7:30.) (No tickets required.)

LINCOLN CENTER FESTIVAL

The conductor Valery Gergiev's Kirov Opera version of Wagner's four-opera cycle **"Der Ring des Nibelungen"** comes to New York after stints in Tokyo, Cardiff, and Orange County. Audiences will be confronted not only with a powerfully Russian style of Wagner singing but also with the audacious sets and costumes of George Tsypin and Tatiana Noginova, which hark back to a primitive Eurasian past quite removed from Wagner's Teutonic roots. Among the singers participating in the double-cast productions are Alexei Tanovitsky, Evgeny Nikitin, Mlada Khudoley, Olga Sergeeva, Nikolai Putilin, and Gennady Bezzubenkov. July 13 and July 16 at 8: **"Das Rheingold."** ♦ July 14 and July 17 at 6: **"Die Walküre."** (Metropolitan Opera House.) ♦ July 14-15 at 8: Philip Glass brings his touch to recent poetry by Leonard Cohen in **"The Book of Longing,"** a music-theatre production presented in its New York première. The participants include the violinist Timothy Fain, the cellist Wendy Sutter, Glass and Michael Riesman on keyboards, and the recorded voice of Cohen himself. (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St.) (212-721-6500.)



POP NOTES
DEADLY UNSERIOUS

Randy Newman once defined success as a songwriter as the absence of a big decline: it's not that you have to get better as you get older so much as that you have to avoid getting worse. By that standard, Loudon Wainwright III is a huge success. On **"Strange Weirdos"** (Concord), which is nominally the soundtrack to the film "Knocked Up" but pretty much plays like a new solo record, Wainwright is as good as he's ever been. Almost forty years into his recording career, he has not only retained his sharpness of wit but has also learned to cut with greater skill.

"Strange Weirdos" has ten new Wainwright songs, rounded out with a new version of his "Lullaby," from 1973, two evocative instrumentals by Joe Henry (who also served as co-producer), and a cover of Peter Blegvad's "Daughter." The opener, "Grey in L.A.," is a jaunty ode in which Wainwright tweaks the city for its oppressive good weather, name-drops the eco-warrior Laurie David and the über-producer Brad Grey, and adds just enough resignation and regret to counter his (considerable) cleverness. But it's "You Can't Fail Me Now," the second song, that gives some idea of the album's depth of field. Over a melody vaguely reminiscent of "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," Wainwright sings (beautifully, as always) about the sadness of love, the shock of its arrival, and the inevitability of its departure. Nebulous emotions are rendered with perfect clarity: "We're taught to love the worst of us / And mercy more than life, but trust me / Mercy's just a warning shot across the bow / I live for yours and you can't fail me now."

If this seems like heady stuff for a film soundtrack, it is. There are simpler songs, and there are nimbler ones—"X or Y" is a nifty chromosomal jingle—but the album is strongest when Wainwright is at his most ambitious and middle-aged. The urban sketch "Valley Morning" could be the opening to a Frederick Barthelme novel. "Doin' the Math" squares up to oncoming old age with mordant honesty. And then there's "Final Frontier," a lexical dissection of love ("It's a vague and a meaningless word / As an idea completely absurd") that's powered by a shattering guitar solo courtesy of Richard Thompson.

—*Ben Greenman*

INTERNATIONAL KEYBOARD INSTITUTE AND FESTIVAL

Jerome Rose's annual festival at the Mannes College of Music is a big-tent affair that can accommodate concerts by a Russian banger (Olga Kern), a French sophisticate (Michel Béroff), and a Canadian eccentric (Marc-André Hamelin) in its two-week schedule. But it all starts with a recital by Rose, who will offer works by Beethoven, Schumann (the Fantasy in C Major), Chopin, and Yehudi Wyner. (150 W. 85th St. 212-580-0210, ext. 4858. July 15 at 8:30.)

NEW YORK GRAND OPERA

The redoubtable Vincent La Selva, a master of Italian style, leads his hardy company in a staged performance of **"La Traviata"** at one of Central Park's more intimate venues, the Naumburg Band Shell. (Mid-park, south of 72nd St. July 18 at 7:30. No tickets required.)

OUT OF TOWN

CARAMOOR

Some highlights from two weeks at Westchester's major music festival. July 5 at 7:30: The young Venezuelan pianist Gabriela Montero, as noted for her uncanny ability to improvise as for her technical prowess, performs works by Bach, Schumann (the Sonata No. 1), and Chopin, along with some of her own keyboard musings. ♦ July 8 at 4:30: The conductor Will Crutchfield's numerous celebrations of the art of bel-canto singing begin with a rare performance of Rossini's "Petite Messe Solonnelle," for voices and keyboards, featuring the soprano Julianna Di Giacomo and the tenor Barry Banks, among others. ♦ July 12 at 7:30: For several years now, Caramoor has been busily commissioning string quartets. The latest has been provided by John Musto; the world première will be given by the Jupiter String Quartet, part of a program that also features quartets by Beethoven and Mendelssohn (in F Minor, Op. 80). ♦ July 14 at 8: Crutchfield returns to conduct **"Il Trovatore,"** in which such estimable singers as Francisco Casanova and Daniel Mobbs will try to avoid being blown off the stage by Ewa Podleś, the powerhouse Polish contralto. (Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-1252. For full listing, see www.caramoor.org.)

TANGLEWOOD

Highlights from two weeks of concerts follow. July 6 at 8:30: The lion of summer music festivals begins its season with both a whisper and a roar. James Levine leads the official opening night, a concert with the Boston Symphony Orchestra that includes Mendelssohn's refined incidental music to "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (featuring the soprano Heidi Grant Murphy, the first of many of Levine's favorite Met singers) and Tchaikovsky's mighty Symphony No. 4. ♦ July 12 at 8:30: Amidst the orchestral grandeur, Jordi Savall's matchless early-music ensemble Hespèrion XXI comes to Ozawa Hall to offer music from thirteenth-century Spain. ♦ July 14 at 8:30: Levine and the B.S.O. return (along with the mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe and the Women of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus) to perform Mahler's Third Symphony. ♦ July 15 at 2:30: The estimable British maestro Mark Elder leads the orchestra in a very Northern program of works by Strauss, Mahler ("Songs of a Wayfarer"), Delius ("Cynara," a lush little rarity for voice and orchestra), and Sibelius (the Symphony No. 2); his guest is the baritone Thomas Hampson. (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200. For full listing, see www.bso.org.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS

The music of Mahler, not usually heard in intimate contexts, is a focus of the woodland festival's summer schedule. July 7 at 6: The first of two weekends of concerts begins with a recital by the mezzo-soprano Julia Bentley and the pianist Babette Hierholzer performing songs and piano pieces by Grieg (the grand "Haugtussa" cycle), Sibelius, Bruckner, and Mahler (songs from "Des Knaben Wunderhorn"). ♦ July 8 at 3: "Vienna in the Twenties," a concert by the Daedalus String Quartet featuring works by Schubert (the "Quartettsatz"), Debussy (the String Quartet), Wagner, and the persuasive late-Romantic Franz Schmidt (the Piano Quintet, with Frederic Chiu). (Woodstock, N.Y. For more information, call 845-679-8217. For full listing, see www.maverickconcerts.org.)

GLIMMERGLASS OPERA

Excursions into summer opera always begin with this eminent company. Michael MacLeod, who has succeeded Paul Kellogg as general and artistic director, has planned an ambitious first season, offering four operas inspired by the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. The season, which runs through August, begins with works by Offenbach and Gluck. July 7 at 8 and July 9 and July 15 at 2: Offenbach's hilarious **"Orpheus in the Underworld"** features the voices of Kurt Lehmann and Jill Gardner; Jean-Marie Zeitouni conducts. ♦ July 8 at 2 and July 14 at 8: Those who enjoyed "Orfeo ed Euridice" at the Met this spring can now sample **"Orphée et Eurydice,"** Gluck's grander French version of his original Italian-language masterpiece, adapted for nineteenth-century orchestra by Berlioz, an ardent fan. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN

The first of two weekends of concerts features the superb young Janaki String Trio, which teams up with the pianist Alpin Hong to perform music by Beethoven, Dohnányi, and Brahms (the Piano Quartet in G Minor). (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126. July 8 at 3. For full listing, see www.musicmountain.org.)

COOPERSTOWN CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

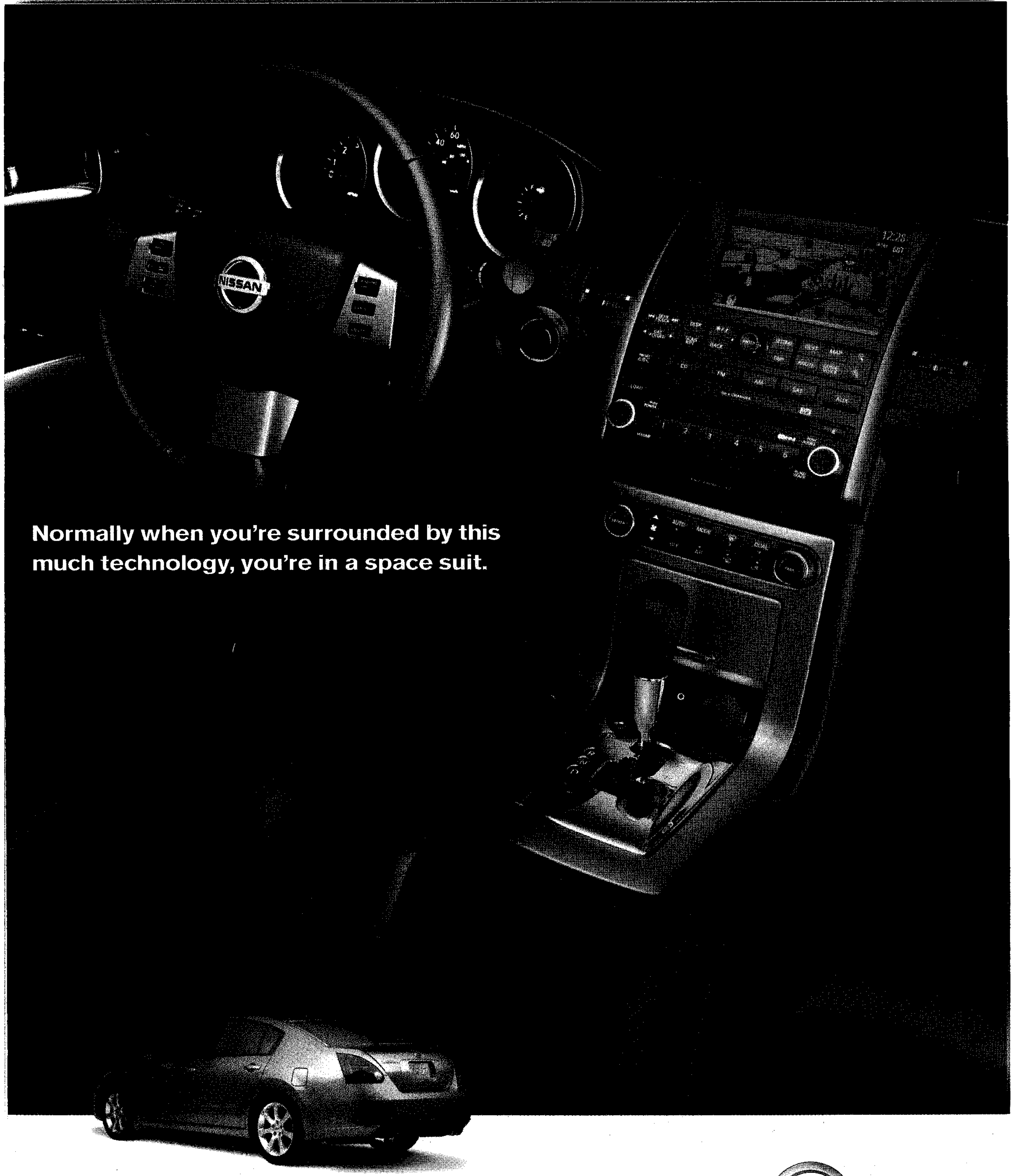
Opera is not the only musical form to thrive in the Leatherstocking Region. There's also chamber music, presented by this nine-year-old festival; its season starts impressively with a recital by the renowned violinist Midori, who (with the pianist Charles Abramovic) performs works by Schubert, Schumann, Bloch, and Brahms. (Farmers' Museum, Cooperstown, N.Y. 877-666-7421. July 10 at 7:30.)

BARD MUSIC FESTIVAL OF THE HAMPTONS

Leon Botstein, who also leads the American Symphony Orchestra, the Jerusalem Symphony, and the Bard Music Festival in the Hudson Valley, has expanded his Bard brand by launching a partnership with the Music Festival of the Hamptons. The inaugural weekend begins with a nod to the twelve-year-old festival's founding director, Lukas Foss, with Botstein conducting the A.S.O. in Foss's "Solomon Rossi Suite" as well as works by Rossini, Mendelssohn, and Beethoven (the "Pastoral" Symphony). (East Hampton Studios, Wainscott, N.Y. 800-644-4418. July 13 at 7:30.)

MARLBORO MUSIC FESTIVAL

No East Coast summer series can match the pedigree of Marlboro, which was founded by a group of renowned émigré musicians headed by Rudolf Serkin. Each weekend brings concerts of chamber music offered by some of the world's most distinguished musicians (including the pianists Richard Goode and Mitsuko Uchida) and their phenomenally talented protégés. (Marlboro, Vt. 802-254-2394. July 14 at 8:30 and July 15 at 2:30. Programs are announced one week in advance at www.marlboromusic.org.)

Normally when you're surrounded by this much technology, you're in a space suit.

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MOVIES OPENING

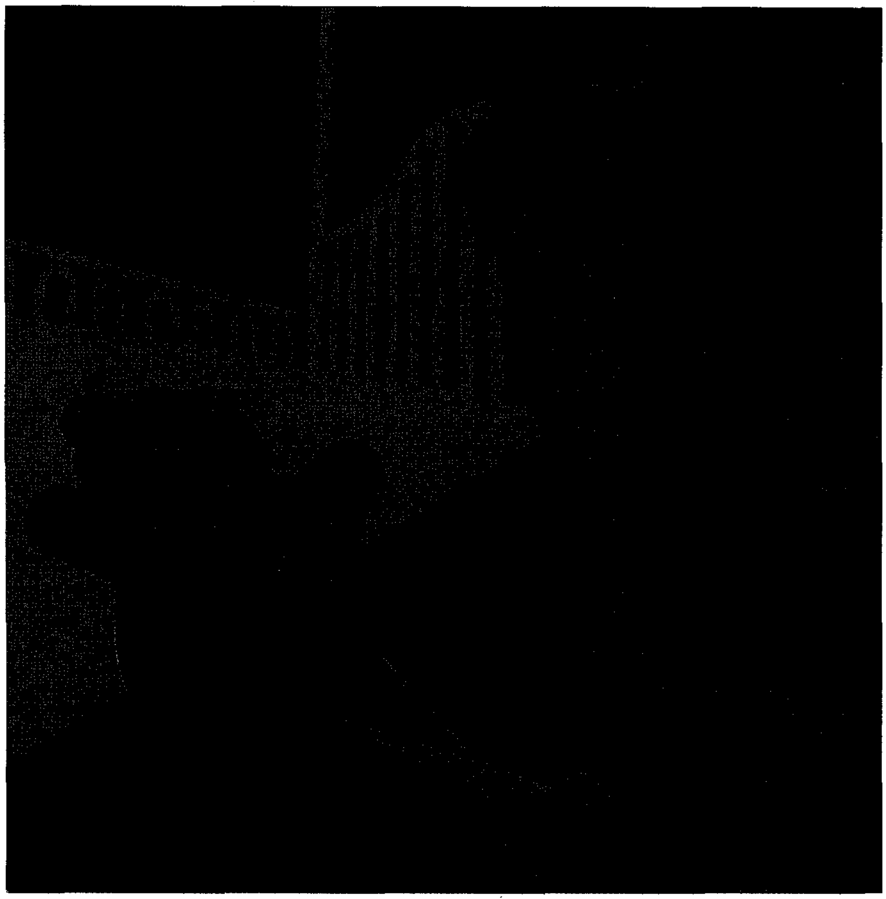
CAPTIVITY
A horror film, directed by Roland Joffé, about the torture of a woman. Starring Elisha Cuthbert. Opening July 13. (In wide release.)

FLYING: CONFESSIONS OF A FREE WOMAN
A documentary by Jennifer Fox, who compares her life with that of other women in the United States and abroad. Opening July 4. (Film Forum.)

TALK TO ME
A drama about Ralph (Petey) Greene, a Washington, D.C., talk-show host. Directed by Kasi Lemmons; starring Don Cheadle, Chiwetel Ejiofor, and Martin Sheen. Opening July 13. (In wide release.)

TIME
Kim Ki-duk directed this drama, about a woman who changes her identity through plastic surgery in order to win back her boyfriend. In Korean. Opening July 13. (Cinema Village.)

TRANSFORMERS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening July 3. (In wide release.)



"Joshua," a thriller directed by George Ratliff and starring Jacob Kogan, opens July 6.

ROBERT PIERSANTI

HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX
In this fourth sequel, a tyrant takes control of Hogwarts. Starring Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, and Emma Watson; directed by David Yates. Opening July 11. (In wide release.)

INTERVIEW
Steve Buscemi directed and co-stars in this drama about a political journalist who is sent to interview a starlet (Sienna Miller). Opening July 13. (In limited release.)

INTRODUCING THE DWIGHTS
In this comedy, a young man's girlfriend and mother battle it out. Starring Brenda Blethyn and Emma Booth. Directed by Cherie Nowlan. Opening July 4. (Lincoln Square and Sunshine Cinema.)

JOSHUA
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening July 6. (In wide release.)

MY BEST FRIEND
In this comedy by Patrice Leconte, an unlikable man (Daniel Auteuil) gets a stranger to impersonate a friend. In French. Opening July 13. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and IFC Center.)

RESCUE DAWN
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening July 4. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

NOW PLAYING

EVAN ALMIGHTY
A family comedy in which God (Morgan Freeman), an Old Testament prankster, wants a newly elected congressman (Steve Carell) to build an ark. Carell's character begins his task reluctantly, as computer-generated animals wreak havoc around him. Tom Shadyac, who also directed "Bruce Almighty," in 2003, handles the sequel timidly, prodding it along with a mercilessly hosanna-fuelled soundtrack, and the talented cast of comic actors (Wanda Sykes, John Goodman, Molly Shannon) are merely foils to Carell's increasing fervor. At a cost of about two million dollars a minute (it's one of the most expensive comedies ever made), there is little to laugh about.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

EVENING
An elderly woman (Vanessa Redgrave) lies dying in her bed, attended by her two daughters (Natasha Richardson, Redgrave's daughter, and Toni Collette) and by memories of a painful and ecstatic weekend decades earlier. In the early fifties, at the Newport wedding of her best friend (Mamie Gummer, Meryl Streep's daughter), she divided her time between two young men—her friend's ranting alcoholic brother (Hugh Dancy) and a handsome young doctor (Patrick Wilson) with whom she fell in love. If we have to watch an actor expire for two hours, Redgrave is the one to watch, and Meryl Streep, playing the long-ago bride, now grown old, has a fine moment, too, lying in bed with Redgrave as the two women look at the past and compare marriages. But this is one of the rare movies that are too sensitive for their own good. In both past and present, the characters spill their feelings about everyone, and the pileup of hurt, rue, and guilt becomes almost oppressive. Susan Minot adapted her own 1998 novel in collaboration with Michael Cunningham, and the narrative scheme they have worked out is far too complicated for the relatively simple story that they have to tell. With Claire Danes as the younger version of Redgrave's character. Directed by Lajos Koltai.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 7/2/07.) (In wide release.)

1408
Yet another adaptation of a Stephen King work concerning an author in peril. This one features John Cusack as a writer of ghost stories who is out to debunk claims of the paranormal. Checking into a hotel on New York's East Side, he tries to unravel a series of mysterious deaths. The film has all the resident-evil tropes of other King stories (creepy and ever-shifting apparitions, ghosts of all shapes and sizes), but it is distinguished by Cusack's slowly unwinding performance, a brilliant turn at making the unbelievable believable. Directed by Mikael Håfström.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

JOSHUA
In George Ratliff's psychological thriller, a family of wealthy Upper East Siders is slowly driven crazy by their brilliant, unearthly son, Joshua (an appropriately unpleasant Jacob Kogan). Vera Farmiga is convincing as Abby, a rebellious mother whose unravelling results in pill-popping and worse; Sam Rockwell is excellent as the affable father who knows he is not nearly as smart as his son; and Dallas Roberts keeps his cool as the gay uncle who benevolently communes with Joshua when everyone else is fawning over the new baby girl in the house. A baffling dénouement, however, spoils an otherwise fairly absorbing film.—*Shauna Lyon* (In wide release.)

LADY CHATTERLEY
For those of us who still believe in D. H. Lawrence as a liberator, this awkward, impoverished, and interminable French version of his most notorious work is something of a trial. The writer-director Pascale Ferran chose to use an earlier version of Lawrence's text ("John Thomas and Lady Jane"), which is less verbose than the final version. Done this way, the adulterous Constance Chatterley (Marina Hands) and her gamekeeper lover, Parkin (Jean-Louis Coulloc'h), speak very little. Unfortunately, neither of the actors suggests an inner life. When they finally undress, the nakedness is a relief, since their bodies are so much more expressive than their faces. When they lay flowers on each other's genitals, however, and then dance in the rain, even the most ardent Lawrentians may want to avert their eyes in embarrassment. In French.—*D.D.* (Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE LONEDALE OPERATOR
This melodrama, from 1911, is one of the hundreds of quickly made short films, produced by the New York-based Biograph company, with which D. W. Griffith launched his directorial career. The tale of a foiled railroad robbery is built around a familiar set of stock characters—an aging father, a stalwart lover, and a plucky young heroine, the Morse-code operator of the title, who rises to the occasion and saves the day—but Griffith both endows them with psychological nuance and elevates them to archetypes. Through his exciting, innovative editing and his dynamic, painterly compositions (some on-screen for a mere flash), a standard-issue crime story becomes a miniature epic. At the start of his career, Griffith discovered the historic role of the cinema: to reveal the enduring grandeur of the everyday.—*Richard Brody* (MOMA; July 5 and July 9.)

A MIGHTY HEART
In films like "Welcome to Sarajevo" (1997) and "In This World" (2002), the British director Michael Winterbottom has proved himself to be as much a reporter as a fabulist. That mixture car-

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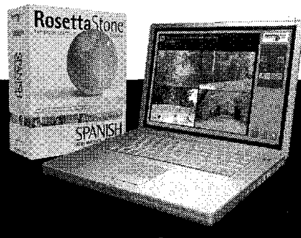

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ries many risks—are we wise to trust the authenticity of a scene, for instance, just because it is shot with a documentary roughness?—but there are times when its urgency feels indispensable. Such is the case with Winterbottom's new movie, which stars Angelina Jolie as Mariane Pearl, the wife of Daniel Pearl (Dan Futterman). He was kidnapped and then killed in Pakistan in 2002, and most of the story takes place in the dreadful hiatus between those two events. The mood is twitchy, the pace deliberately bewildering, and the moral impetus calculated to leave us of two minds; as the police brutalize a suspect, we both deplore the action and crave the information that it extracts. The greatest surprise is Jolie, who, rather than grandstanding, allows her character to be swept along, and half-swamped, by the horror of those days. With Will Patton, too creepy by half in the role of a security expert.—*Anthony Lane* (6/25/07) (In wide release.)

SICKO

In the beginning of Michael Moore's attack on America's health-care system, he records heartbreaking interviews with families who have been betrayed or neglected by H.M.O.s and insurance companies. But then Moore hauls off three ailing Ground Zero rescue workers and other seriously ill people to Guantánamo Bay, where the detainees allegedly get good (and free) health care. The sick Americans are turned away, of course, and the joke seems insensitive. Moore does find some help for the rescue workers in Havana (the other sick Americans mysteriously vanish), and the rest of the movie is devoted to the wonders of health care in Canada, England, and France as well as in Cuba. But Moore accepts what doctors and patients abroad say at face value—as a report on national health services in different countries, the movie is worthless—and he doesn't interview a single American who might have ideas about reforming our own system. Since the majority of Americans want some form of national health care, Moore, for once, seems behind the curve.—*D.D.* (7/2/07) (In wide release.)

VERA CRUZ

Gary Cooper, as an honorable Confederate colonel who becomes a soldier of fortune in Mexico, asks the key question for this and all the south-of-the-border Westerns that followed: "What gets into Americans down here?" Robert Aldrich's SuperScope and Technicolor spectacle, co-starring Burt Lancaster as Cooper's greedy sometime partner, introduces the dynamic cross-cultural imagery and iconoclasm later explored in films from "The Magnificent Seven" to "The Professionals" and "The Wild Bunch." It's an exotic, entertaining shoot-'em-up, with a cast that includes Cesar Romero, Ernest Borgnine, and Charles Bronson. Released in 1954.—*Michael Sragow* (BAM; July 11.)

YOU KILL ME

The new film from John Dahl stars Ben Kingsley as Frank, a drunken Polish hit man: an obvious career move for the man who once played Gandhi. Until vodka got the better of him, Frank worked for the Polish Mob in Buffalo; now he is sent to San Francisco to get his life together so he can come back and kill people. It's a tart, misanthropic conceit, and the script, by Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely, leaves no irony unturned; better still, we get Bill Pullman as Frank's Mephistopheles, a real-estate agent stripped of all illusion, and Téa Leoni (one of the film's executive producers and the most unsentimental actress in Hollywood) as the lonely cynic to whom our hero turns. Yet their romance seldom rings true, and a pall of indecision hangs over the whole tale; where Dahl's finest work, like "The Last Seduction," cleaves proudly to a genre, this film doesn't know whether it's a Mob thriller, a tar-black comedy, or a grudging lesson in love. Despite the promise concealed in the title, it never slays you.—*A.L.* (In wide release.)

Also Playing

LIVE FREE OR DIE HARD: In wide release. **RATATOUILLE:** In wide release. **LA VIE EN ROSE:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—Special screenings. July 5 at 7:30: "From the Other Side" (2002, Chantal Akerman; in English and Spanish). ♦ July 6 at 7 and July 7 at 8: "Raiders of the Lost Ark: The Adaptation" (1982-89, Eric Zala). ♦ "Essential Cinema." July 7 at 4:30: "The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man" (1963-82, Ron Rice). ♦ July 13 at 7:30: "The Flowers of St. Francis" (1950, Roberto Rossellini; in Italian, no subtitles). ♦ Living Theatre tribute. July 12 at 7 and 9, July 13 at 7, and July 14-15 at 5 and 9:15: "The Brig" (1964, Jonas Mekas). ♦ July 13 at 9 and July 14-15 at 7: "The Connection" (1961, Shirley Clarke).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—Afro-Punk Festival. ♦ July 4 at 4:30: An illustrated lecture by the historian Roz Payne about the Black Panther Party. ♦ Through July 29: "Signore & Signore: Leading Ladies of Italian Cinema." All films are in Italian. July 6 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "I Knew Her So Well" (1965, Antonio Pierangeli). ♦ July 7 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:40: "The Bishop's Bedroom" (1977, Dino Risi). The 6:50 screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with Ornella Muti. ♦ July 8 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "The Seduction of Mimi" (1972, Lina Wertmüller). ♦ July 12 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Old-Fashioned World" (1941, Mario Soldati). ♦ July 13 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Lady Without Camelias" (1953, Michelangelo Antonioni). ♦ July 14 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Bread, Love, and Dreams" (1953, Luigi Comencini). ♦ July 15 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Bellissima" (1951, Luchino Visconti). ♦ Films by Robert Aldrich. July 9 at 6:50 and 9:15: ". . . All the Marbles" (1981). ♦ July 10 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Hustle" (1975). ♦ July 11 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Vera Cruz" (†).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. July 4-12 at 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, and 9:50: "Le Doulos" (1962, Jean-Pierre Melville). ♦ July 13-19: "Manhattan" (1979, Woody Allen).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—The films of René Clair. July 10 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "Break the News" (1937). ♦ July 17 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "Beauties of the Night" (1952; in French).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—Special screenings. July 6-12 (call for showtimes): "De Lama Lamina" (2004, Matthew Barney) and short films by Barney. ♦ In revival. July 6-12 (call for showtimes): "The Draughtsman's Contract" (1982, Peter Greenaway) and "A Zed and Two Noughts" (1985, Greenaway). ♦ July 13-15 at noon: "The Rules of the Game" (1939, Jean Renoir; in French). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." July 6-7: "El Topo" (1970, Alejandro Jodorowsky; in Spanish).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"MOMA Laffs." July 4 at 6 and July 7 at 4:30: "Steamboat Bill, Jr." (1928, Charles F. Reisner, Jr.; silent). ♦ July 4 at 8: "Modern Times" (1936, Charlie Chaplin). ♦ July 5 at 6:30 and July 9 at 8:30: "Mr. and Mrs. Smith" (1941, Alfred Hitchcock). ♦ July 8 at 2 and July 11 at 8: "Smiles of a Summer Night" (1955, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ July 8 at 4:30 and July 11 at 6: "A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy" (1982, Woody Allen). ♦ "Still Moving." July 4 at 7:30 and July 8 at 2: "Broken Blossoms" (1919, D. W. Griffith; silent). ♦ July 5 at 6 and July 9 at 8: Short Biograph films directed by or featuring D. W. Griffith, including "The Lonedale Operator" (†). ♦ July 6 at 7:30: "The White Rose" (1923, Griffith; silent). ♦ July 7 at 2: "The Avenging Conscience" (1914, Griffith; silent).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Classic and recent horror films. July 7 at 2: "Dawn of the Dead" (2004, Zack Snyder) and "Thriller" (1983, John Landis). ♦ July 7 at 4:30: "Dead of Night"

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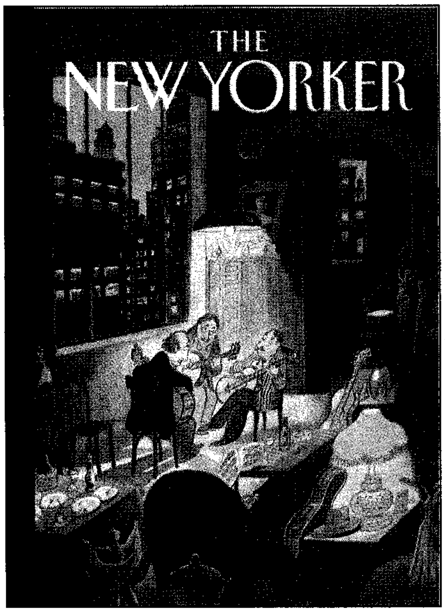
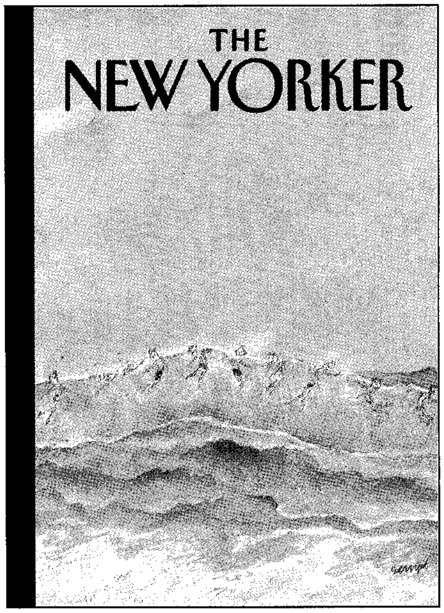


"Three Amigos"



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(1974, Bob Clark). ♦ July 7 at 6:30: "Homecoming" (2005, Joe Dante). ♦ July 8 at 4:30: "Martin" (1977, George A. Romero).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"Garbo & Dietrich: Screen Goddesses." July 7-8 at 6: "The Scarlet Empress" (1934, Josef von Sternberg). July 7-8 at 8: "Queen Christina" (1934, Rouben Mamoulian).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"30 Years of Kino International." July 4 at 9, July 5 at 1:30, and July 8 at 2: "La Vie de Bohème" (1992, Aki Kaurismäki; in French). ♦ July 6 at 6:30: "M" (1931, Fritz Lang; in German). ♦ July 8 at 6:15 and July 11 at 4 and 8:30: "Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors" (1964, Sergei Paradjanov; in Ukranian). ♦ July 8 at 8:15 and July 12 at 2: "L'Âge d'Or" (1930, Luis Buñuel; in French). ♦ July 10 at 3:30: "Yeelen" (1987, Souleymane Cissé; in French and Bambara). ♦ Films by Woodfall Film Productions. July 13 at 1:30 and 6:30 and July 15 at 1 and 5:30: "Tom Jones" (1963, Tony Richardson). ♦ July 13 at 4, July 14 at 1:30, and July 15 at 8: "Look Back in Anger" (1958, Richardson). ♦ July 14 at 6:10, July 15 at 3:30, and July 16 at 2: "The Entertainer" (1960, Richardson). ♦ July 16 at 6:15 and July 17 at 2: "The Charge of the Light Brigade" (1968, Richardson). The July 16 screening will be introduced by Vanessa Redgrave.

READINGS AND TALKS

DELACORTE THEATRE
The Public Theatre presents a free staged reading of "In Darfur," a drama by Winter Miller, a playwright and research assistant to the *Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof. The play ran in April at the Public; the same cast returns to perform the work in Central Park. Kristof will also be on hand to lead a post-show discussion. (Central Park near W. 81st St.. For more information, call 212-539-8750. July 9 at 8.)

THE CORNER BOOKSTORE
Anne Fadiman reads from her latest collection, "At Large and At Small: Familiar Essays." (Madison Ave. at 93rd St. For reservations, call 212-722-4343. July 10 at 6.)

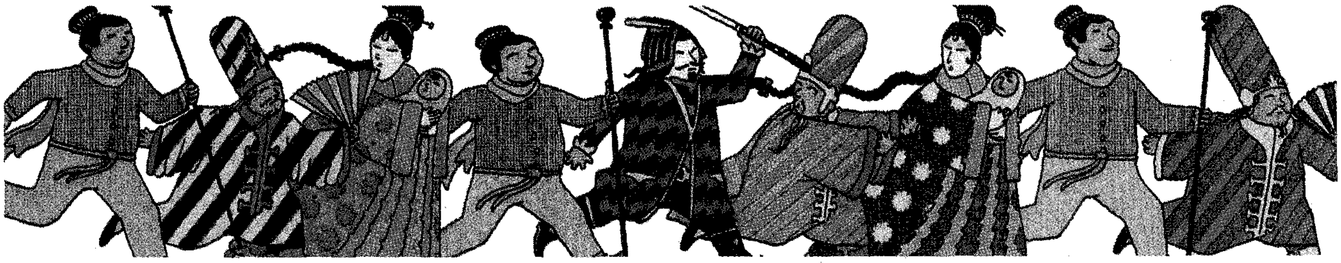
"SECRET SCIENCE CLUB"
Eric Kandel, a neuroscientist who won the Nobel Prize in 2000, gives a talk about how memories are created in the brain, at the Brooklyn bar Union Hall. (Try to keep up—the Amnesiac Punch will be the special of the night.) (702 Union St., Park Slope. 718-638-4400. July 11 at 8.)

"MAD. SQ. READS"
The humor writers Roy Blount, Jr. ("Long Time Leaving: Dispatches from Up South"), and Cathleen Schine ("The New Yorkers") read from their work. (Fifth Ave. at 24th St. For more information, call 212-538-6667. July 12 at 6:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

MACY'S FOURTH OF JULY FIREWORKS
A tradition that started with the country's bicentennial continues with what promises to be another stunning pyrotechnic display. Barges will take their customary places in the East River, from approximately Forty-second Street to Twenty-third Street, and off the South Street Seaport. Starting at 7:30, the New York City Fire Department will warm up the gathering crowds with a red-white-and-blue water display put on by fireboats in the East River. The actual fireworks start at about 9:20, at a rate of more than a thousand shots per minute, continuing for half an hour. (For more information, call 212-494-4495.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
María Félix, known as La Doña, was a legend of Mexican cinema, a conjugal adventurer (she had four husbands) immortalized in countless films, songs, portraits, and even a posthumous line of gold-and-jewel-encrusted watches by Cartier (she was a major customer of the house). Félix sometimes starred in European films, such as Renoir's "French Cancan," but refused to accept the smaller roles Hollywood offered ("I was not born to carry a basket," she said). She expired on her eighty-eighth birthday, in 2002; now her estate—including paintings, furniture, couture, jewelry, and her over-the-top collection of porcelain—will be put up for auction at **Christie's** (July 17-18). There is a portrait of her by Rivera, as well as one by Carrington that has never before been publicly exhibited, a Surrealist composition in which La Doña appears as a mysterious tarot card. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ The Indian megacity of Calcutta (a.k.a. Kolkata) is an industrial center, a trading hub, and, more recently, a leader in information technology. Now the government of West Bengal and a group of private investors have come together to create a major new museum, the Kolkata Museum of Modern Art (KMOMA). **Sotheby's** will devote most of the proceeds from an upcoming auction (July 17) to the project; artists, collectors, and galleries have donated works by a wide selection of modern and contemporary Indian artists, including Tyeb Mehta, Jehangir Sabavala, Rameshwar Broota, and Arpita Singh. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)



JIM STOTEN

"Second Visit to the Empress," at Lincoln Center.

ON THE HORIZON

NIGHT LIFE
SHIPWRECKED
July 21

The Siren Music Festival draws hipsters of all ages to Coney Island for a day of free rock and roll. This year's acts include the New York Dolls, M.I.A., Cursive, Dr. Dog, the Detroit Cobras, and Elvis Perkins. (www.villagevoice.com/siren.)

DANCE
RENAISSANCE MAN
July 24 and July 28-29

At the Lincoln Center Festival, the choreographer, painter, and designer Shen Wei applies his poetic visual imagery to his first opera, the three-hundred-year-old "Second Visit to the Empress"—in its first new staging in two centuries. The concept, sets, costumes, choreography, and direction are all by Wei; the four central roles will be complemented by a corps of twelve dancers from his company, Shen Wei Dance Arts, including Wei himself. (212-721-6500.)

ART
EN ESPAÑOL
July 25-Jan. 6, 2008

Later this month, El Museo del Barrio opens its fifth biennial exhibition of work by emerging artists of Latin-American heritage. Some fifty artists are on this year's roster—among them José Lerma, Courtney Smith, William Villalongo, and five artists from Ecuador, this year's specially invited country. (212-831-7272.)

MOVIES
RIALTO REELS
July 25-Aug. 10

Many of the most important revivals and restorations in the last ten years have been undertaken by Rialto. MOMA presents an array of this distributor's treasures, including Jean-Luc Godard's "Masculine Feminine," Robert Bresson's "Au Hasard Balthazar," Jean-Pierre Melville's "Army of Shadows," and the one and only "Godzilla." (212-708-9480.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
METRO NORTH
July 28

James Levine's ascendancy at Tanglewood has made opera more prominent than ever there. "Don Carlo," featuring the Met stalwarts Patricia Racette and James Morris, is one of three works Levine will conduct this summer. (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200.)

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SHARP AND MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL® LEGEND HANK AARON

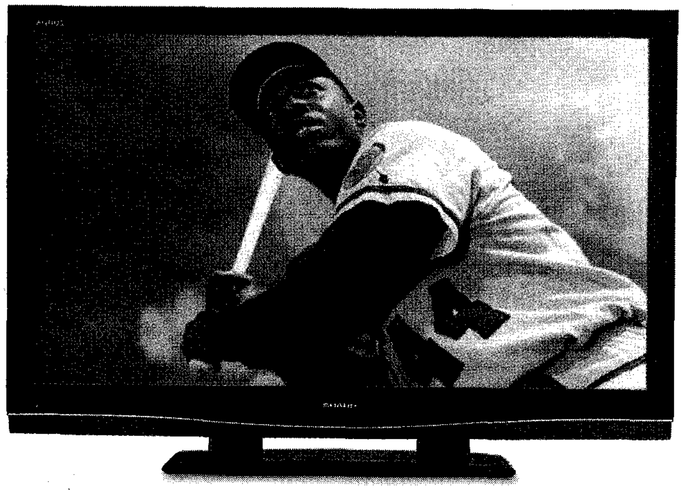
Leadership is a rare quality. It's a demonstration of commitment and excellence that inspires others to reach for the same standard. The reward of leadership is success and Hank Aaron was a leader early in the game. At twenty-three, he was voted the National League™ MVP and led his team to a World Series® triumph. He did it by learning from those who blazed a trail before him, and by expecting nothing but the best from himself and his teammates. Teamwork and shared vision have produced winning results for Sharp. With its awe-inspiring technology, Sharp paved the way from analog CRT to digital liquid crystal television, proving that if you always bring your A game, the rest will follow. This is the second installment of a two-part Q&A with "Hammerin' Hank."

Who was the greatest leader you saw on the field?

AARON: I'd have to say Jackie Robinson. He was like a Michael Jordan of baseball, and the only one I saw on the field that could make his teammates rally around him and do things they didn't do before.

How did he do that?

AARON: Jackie Robinson played the infield, so he was in constant conversation with the pitcher. And he talked to the catcher. He would almost *call* the pitches. You just knew that he was always in control of the game and made everyone else great around him. And he was a leader in other ways, too. If it hadn't been for him, we wouldn't have seen the likes of many of the great ballplayers of that time. Jackie gave me and Willie Mays an opportunity to excel; he gave it to all of us. It's something I think about a lot: What if Jackie hadn't come along? But he showed the way and we were able to follow.



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Aaron's enduring stature in baseball casts a long shadow

What was your most memorable moment in baseball?

AARON: That would be in 1957, when I hit the eleventh-inning home run to clinch the pennant for the Milwaukee Braves® off of Billy Muffett with the Cardinals®, because the year before, we lost the pennant to the Dodgers® by one game. I really cherished this homer the most because, hey, it sent us to the World Series®, and we went on to beat the Yankees® in seven games that year. You couldn't ask for anything better than that.

The Hank Aaron Award is given every year to the best offensive player in both leagues. Who do you think is deserving of an award now?

AARON: If I had to name one, I think of Ken Griffey, Jr. I've always admired his swing. Of course, he's been hurt these last few years, but I still believe that he, of all the players I've seen, has the ability to do some things that a lot of players are just not capable of doing. He is strictly the kind of ballplayer I would pay to go see.

Have you watched games on high-definition TV?

AARON: Not yet. I understand it's fantastic, though. I was talking to a friend the other day who said you haven't watched baseball till you've watched it on high definition. I've got to do that.

LEFT: AARON IN 1957 © MARK RUCKER/TRANSCENDENTAL GRAPHICS/GETTY IMAGES; RIGHT: AARON IN B&W © GEORGE SILK/TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES

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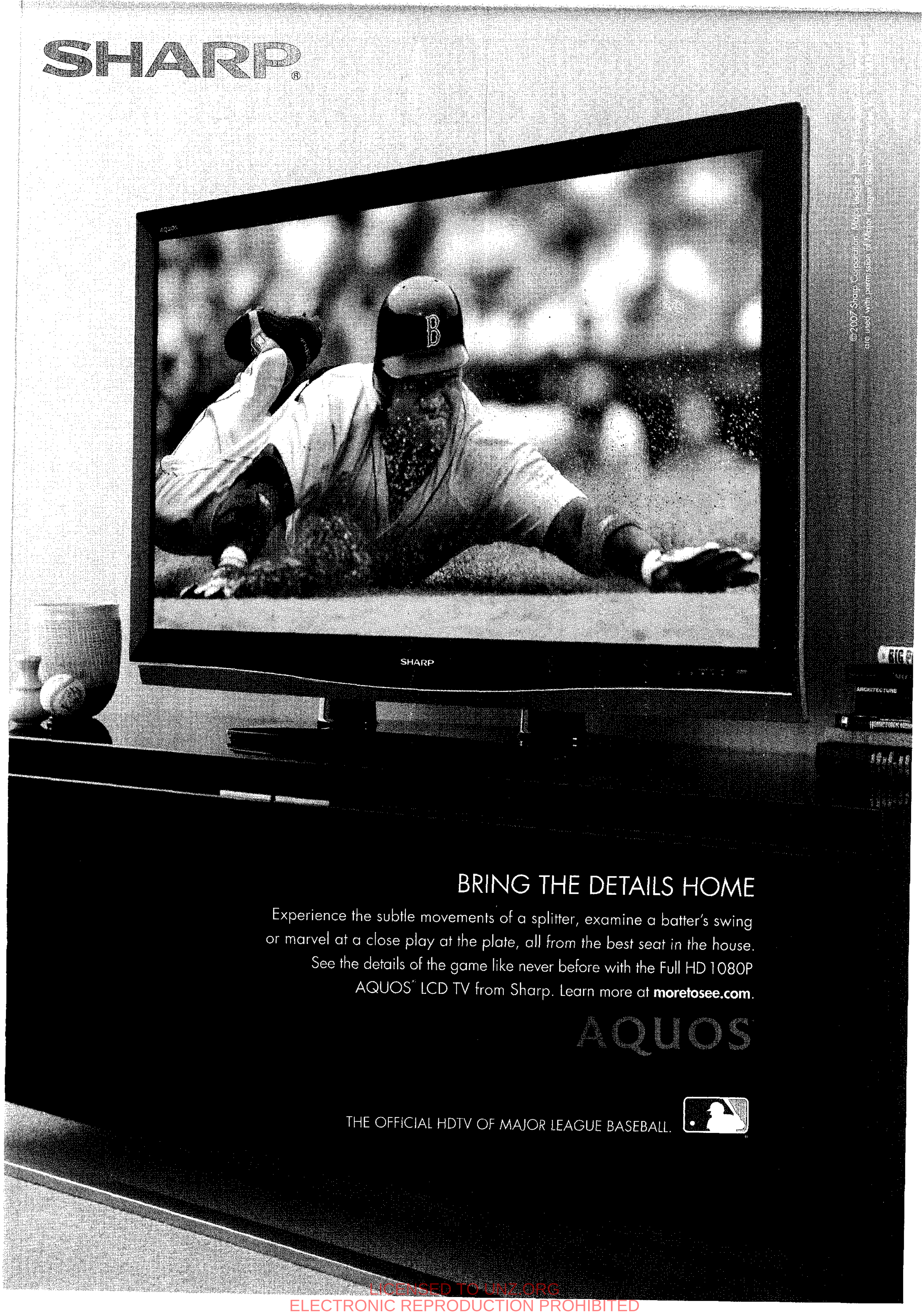

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AT HOME OR TRAVELING—
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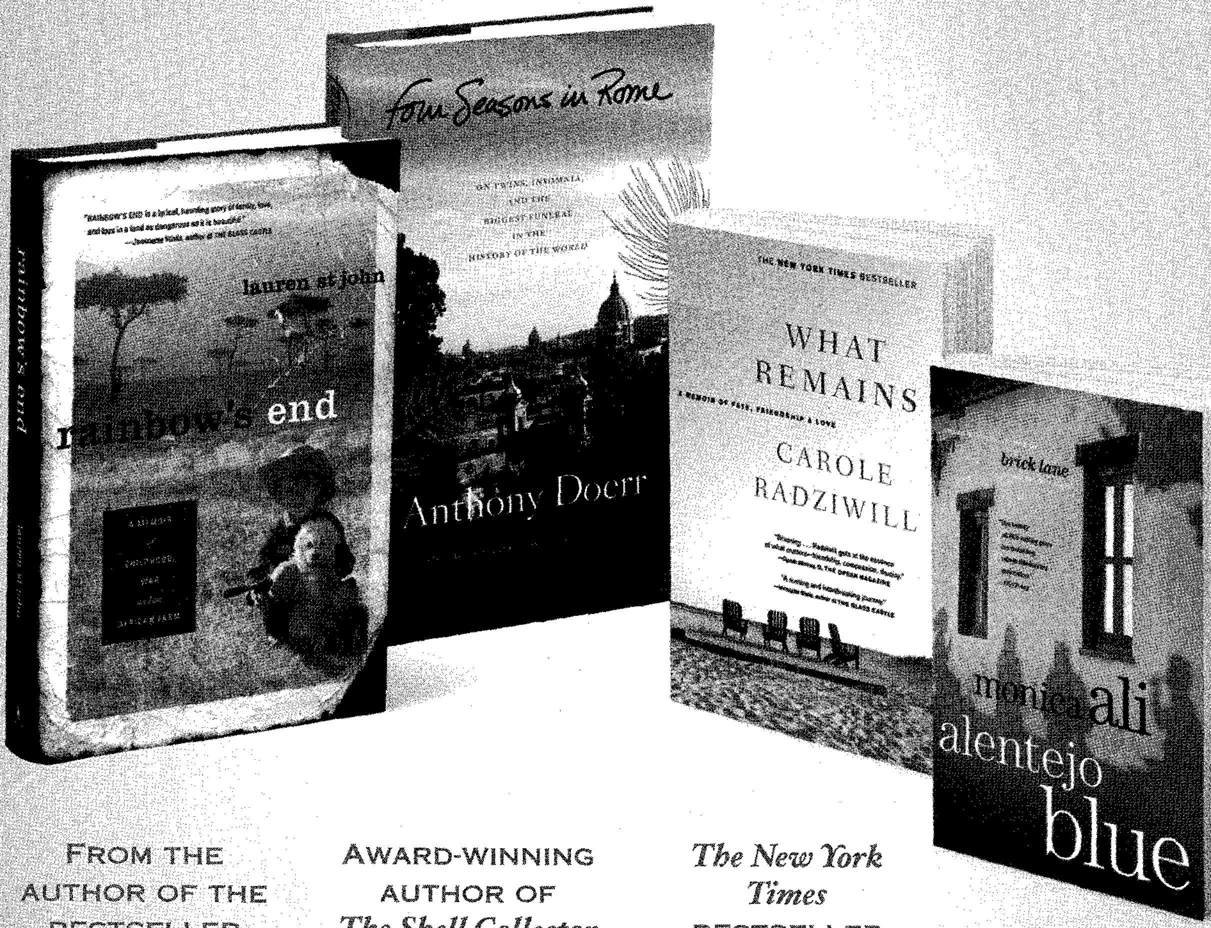
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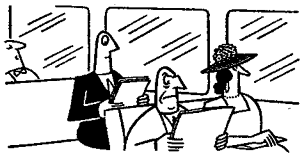
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

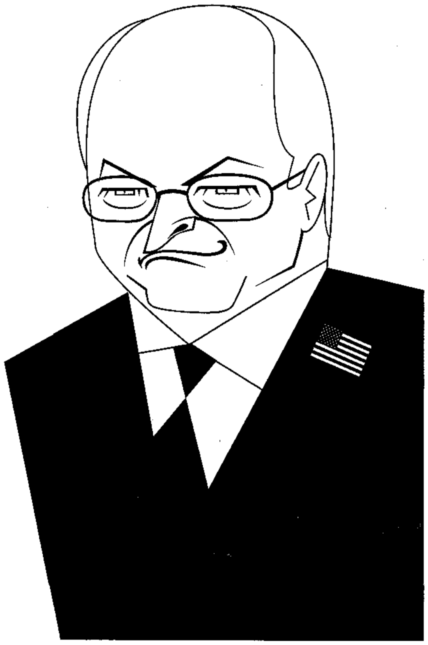
COMMENT
THE DARKSIDER



It took thirty years for "Frost/Nixon" to reach Broadway. Assuming that civilization survives and the Great White Way remains above water, we can expect "Cheney/Bush" to mount the boards sometime in the late twenty-thirties or early twenty-forties. The playwright and the actors, whoever they are, will have plenty to work with. The story of the scowling, scheming, domineering, silently sinister Vice-President and the spoiled, petted prince who becomes his plaything is irresistible—set in a pristine White House, played against an ominous, unseen background of violence and catastrophe, like distant thunder, and packed with drama, palace intrigue, and black comedy.

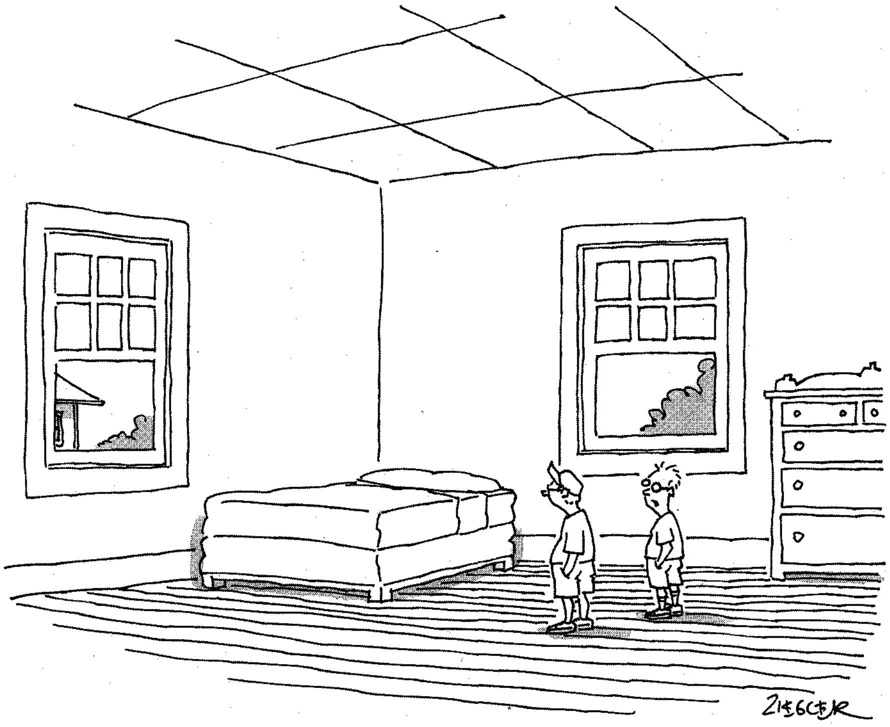
A thick sheaf of new material has lately been added to the Cheney folder. For four days last week, the front page of the Washington *Post* was dominated by a remarkable series of articles slugged "ANGLER: THE CHENEY VICE PRESIDENCY." ("Angler," Cheney's metaphorically apt Secret Service code name, refers to one of his two favorite outdoor pastimes, the one less hazardous to elderly lawyers.) The series, by Barton Gellman and Jo Becker, occupied sixteen broadsheet pages and topped out at twenty thousand words. The headline over last Monday's installment encapsulates the burden of the whole: "The Unseen Path to Cruelty."

Some of the *Post's* findings have been foreshadowed elsewhere, notably in Jane Mayer's dispatches in this magazine. (See, especially, Letter from Washington, "The Hidden Power," July 3, 2006.) But many of the details and incidents that Gellman and Becker document are as new as they are appalling. More important, the pattern that emerges from the accumulated weight of the reporting is, as the lawyers say, dispositive. Given the ontological authority that the *Post* shares only with the New York *Times*, it is now, so to speak, official: for the past six years, Dick Cheney, the occupant of what John Adams called "the most insignificant office that ever the invention of man contrived," has been the most influential public official in the country, not necessarily excluding President Bush, and his influence has been entirely malign. He is pathologically (but purposefully) secretive; treacherous toward colleagues; coldly manipulative of the callow, lazy, and ignorant President he serves; contemptuous of public opinion; and dismissive not only of international law (a fairly standard attitude for conservatives of his stripe) but also of the very idea that the Constitution and laws of the United States, including laws signed by his nominal superior, can be construed to limit the power of the executive to take any action that can plausibly be classified as part of an endless, endlessly expandable "war on terror."



More than anyone else, including his mentor and departed co-conspirator, Donald Rumsfeld, Cheney has been the intellectual author and bureaucratic facilitator of the crimes and misdemeanors that have inflicted unprecedented disgrace on our country's moral and political standing: the casual trashing of habeas corpus and the Geneva Conventions; the claim of authority to seize suspects, including American citizens, and imprison them indefinitely and incommunicado, with no right to due process of law; the outright encouragement of "cruel," "inhuman," and "degrading" treatment of prisoners; the use of un-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROBERT RISKO



"My parents sent back all my stuff that came from China."

doubted torture, including waterboarding (Cheney: "a no-brainer for me"), which for a century the United States had prosecuted as a war crime; and, of course, the bloody, nightmarish Iraq war itself, launched under false pretenses, conducted with stupefying incompetence, and escalated long after public support for it had evaporated, at the cost of scores of thousands of lives, nearly half a trillion dollars, and the crippling of America's armed forces, which no longer overawe and will take years to rebuild.

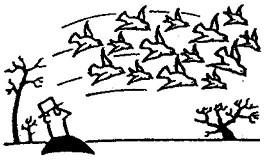
The stakes are lower in domestic affairs—if only because fewer lives are directly threatened—but here, too, Cheney's influence has been invariably baleful. With an avalanche of examples, Gellman and Becker show how Cheney successfully pushed tax cuts for the very rich that went beyond what even the President, wanly clinging to the shards of "compassionate conservatism," and his economic advisers wanted. They show how Cheney's stealthy domination of regulatory and environmental policy, driven by "unwavering ideological positions" and always exerted "for the benefit of business," has resulted in the deterioration of air and water quality, the degradation and commercial exploitation of national parks and forests, the collapse of wild-salmon fisheries, and the curt abandonment of Bush's 2000 campaign pledge to do something about greenhouse gases. They also reveal that it was Cheney who forced Christine Todd Whitman to resign as the Environmental Protection Agency's administrator, by dictating a rule that excused refurbished power plants and oil refineries from installing modern pollution controls. "I just couldn't sign it," she told them. Turns out she wasn't so anxious to spend more time with her family after all.

Cheney, Gellman and Becker report, drew up and vetted a list of five appellate judges from which Bush drew his Supreme Court appointments. After naming John Roberts to the Court and then to the Chief Justice's chair, the President, for once, rebelled: without getting permission from down the hall, he nominated his old retainer Harriet Miers for the second opening. ("Didn't have the nerve to tell me himself," Cheney muttered to an associate, according to the *Post*.) But when Cheney's right-wing allies upended Miers, Bush obediently went back to Cheney's list and picked Samuel Alito. The result is a Court majority that, last Thursday, ruled that conscious racial integration is the moral equivalent of conscious racial segregation.

That unfortunate day in the duck blind wasn't the only time the Vice-President has seemed more Elmer Fudd than Ernst Blofeld; last week, Cheney provoked widespread hilarity by pleading executive privilege (in order to deny one set of documents to the Senate Judiciary Committee) while simultaneously maintaining that his office is not part of the executive branch (in order to deny another set to the Information Security Oversight Office of the National Archives). On Cheney's version of the government organization chart, it seems, the location of the Office of the Vice-President is undisclosed. So are the powers that, in a kind of rolling, slow-motion coup d'état, he has gathered unto himself. The laughter will fade quickly; the current Administration, regrettably, will not. However more politically moribund it may become, its writ still has a year and a half to go. A few weeks ago, on an aircraft carrier in the Persian Gulf, the Vice-President issued threats of war with Iran. A "senior American diplomat" told the *Times* that Cheney's speech had not been circulated broadly in the government before it was delivered, adding, "He kind of runs by his own rules." But, too often, his rules rule. The awful climax of "Cheney/Bush" may be yet to come.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

WHODUNNIT DEPT.
BIRDNAP



Last month, the National Audubon Society issued a paper documenting a decline in the populations of many common American birds, including bobwhites, whip-poor-wills, grackles, and grosbeaks. The study did not list the feral domestic pigeon as a species under siege, but apparently it is—at least, in certain local precincts. In Greenwich Village, residents are reporting a *Columba livia domestica* crime wave. Like the Upper East Side flock-nappings of a few years back, this recent spate of abductions has become a heated mystery, giving rise to the feeling, among residents, of having stepped into an episode of "Law & Order: Avian Victims Unit."

Judith Monaco Callet was walking her neighbor's dog one afternoon in April when she saw a man in an S.U.V. with tinted windows park on the west side of LaGuardia, near Bleecker. The man—Callet thinks he was Caucasian, and wearing a cap—got out of the S.U.V., crossed the street, and threw a big pile of birdseed onto the pavement. "Out of the corner of my eye," Callet said the other day, "I saw a big black net, like a butterfly or fishing net. So I see it moving, and I'm thinking somebody's lost a cat. The guy swooped the net up, closed it off, and there he went." He made off with about fifteen pigeons.

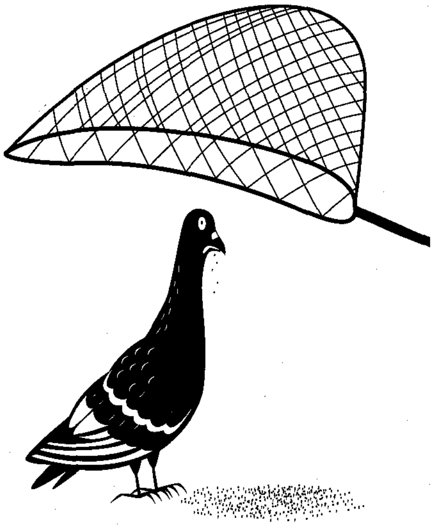
A few feet away, in LaGuardia Corner Gardens, was Wilhelmine Hellmann, a retired electron microscopist, tending to her peach tree. "Wilhelmine shouted, 'Get the license plate!' " Callet recalled. Callet managed to jot down the number before the S.U.V. sped away. She called the police and, later, the *Villager*, which noted the incident. "Someone is scooping up Village pigeons and no one knows why," the paper warned.

In and around LaGuardia Corner Gardens recently, theories abounded on where all the birds have gone. Hellmann, snapping on a pair of yellow rubber gloves, asserted that her first sighting of the birdnapper, on Eighth Street, had left her stunned. "I can't judge people, but that a person thinks he has a right to scoop up pigeons—that just drives me crazy," she said. She wanted to put to rest, while she was at it, the stereotypical association of pigeons with breadcrumb-sprinkling elderly women. "That is a made-up concept," she said, rooting around in the dirt for a dead rat. "There are plenty of little old men."

Only a few weeks ago, Hellmann said, she was at the garden when a van pulled up. Same deal: sprinkle, net, swoop. Joe O'Connell, the resident rosarian, tried to scare the intruder off. "I was waving a shovel, screaming every word under the sun," he recalled. "Boom—he was in the van with them and gone." O'Connell said he had heard that the birds were being ground up to make meal for ferrets. He added, "This may sound like a paranoid theory, but does it have anything to do with bird flu?"

A few plots over from Hellmann, a gardener who gave his name as Jack was pruning his daylilies. A couple of years ago, he said, he'd seen something similar happen early on a Sunday morning. He put forth two explanations: either the pigeons were being eaten, perhaps in Chinatown, or they were being taken to shooting ranges in Pennsylvania. "You know something—just hit me right now?" he asked, his tone turning ominous. He looked across LaGuardia to the umbrellas of Señor Swanky's. "Rich folk don't like pigeons." Jack pointed out a set of spiky metal apparatuses that, along with a parliament's worth of owl decoys, had been installed on the window ledges of a nearby building. "It's, like, follow the money." Another gardener whispered, "Maybe it's N.Y.U.!"

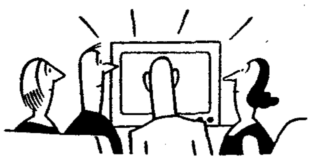
The next day, a reporter received a phone call from an anonymous man claiming to speak for Bird Operations Busted, a self-styled pigeon-liberation outfit. He explained that there are two kinds of birdnappers: netters and hoopers. "The hooper goes for particular birds, whether for breeding purposes, for his own collection, or for blackmail—'If you want your bird back, you better cough up the cash.' " Netters, meanwhile, sweep up birds indiscriminately, delivering them to brokers, who pay two to five dollars a head. "So far, we have detected at least sixty-three vehicles being used for birdnetting in New York City," the man said. Some hot spots: Thirteenth Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, Eighty-sixth Street at Third Avenue, the Roosevelt Island tramway.



Back at the garden, Jack remained unconvinced that his neighborhood wasn't a target. He gestured toward a few lonely birds, perched on the roof of a supermarket. "There are a lot fewer than there used to be," he said. "And another thing: we don't see as many squirrels."

—*Lauren Collins*

LANGUAGE STUDIES
WHAT THE—?



Trickle-down behaviorists, beware: if George W. Bush can use a popular synonym for dung, as he did when talking to Tony Blair at last year's G-8 summit, and if Dick Cheney, on the floor of the U.S. Senate, can deploy a word usually meant to refer to sexual intercourse, then who are we to demonize the lowly entertainers and truck drivers who employ such language on a regular basis? This, essentially, was the argument of the Second Circuit Court of Appeals when, last month, it prohibited the F.C.C. from fining television networks for broadcasting what it called "fleeting expletives." (The phrase itself has the ring of a naughty euphemism.) Katie Couric, cuss away.

There are, predictably, dissenters. Daniel Henninger, a deputy editor of the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, wrote, "The slovenly, unrestrained ethos behind talking dirty on live TV devalues the idea of a more-or-less controlled life," and implied—zounds!—that national defense was potentially at stake. But even some blasphemers have found this seeming erosion of taboo an occasion for alarm. "Bit by bit, these terms are being neutered," Ed Conway, a London newspaper reporter, said the other day. "Swear words perform a useful function in conversation, to shock or engage. Once we lose that, where are we left?"

A few weeks ago, Conway launched a "Campaign to Devise a New Swear Word for the 21st Century," using Facebook, the social-networking site preferred by those who are too young to have heard "rear end," "friggin'," or "pshaw" used unironically. He included a decline-and-fall narrative of profanity ("14th century—swearing still a crime, with victims subjected to torture, stocks, tongue- or lip-piercing. . . . 19th century—use of the word 'damn' becomes acceptable. . . . 20th century—RIP 'wanker' "). As of late last week, the campaign had attracted about two hundred and fifty advocates and several dozen submissions, from both sides of the pond. (Brits, Conway believes, are more inventive and permissive when it comes to cursing.)

The most printable candidates so far include "spaff," "pok," "gash," "gosling," "ragnarok," "shagsack," "melted welly," and "bacardigan." Some of them even come with fictional etymological backgrounds. " 'Gurumboh'—East Bank Jordanian for 'bullsh*t,' " one Cantabrigian posted. Another wrote, "Whatever we come up with, at least it'll be better than 'Battlestar Galactica' 's 'frack.' "

News of the campaign soon reached Dr. Timothy Jay, a professor of cognitive psychology at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and the author of "Cursing in America" and "What to Do When Your Kids Talk Dirty." Jay wrote an expert opinion in support of the Second Circuit's ruling, but he was not too excited about Conway's idea. "I've got fifty years of swearing behind me," he said. " 'Fuck' and 'goddam' have served me pretty well. This would be like introducing an exotic plant into a thriving native garden. Language is organic. It grows what it needs."

Conway attributes his semi-professional affinity for crudeness to the seventeenth-century verse of the Earl of Rochester ("It's kind of fantastic, in an incredibly vivid and naughty way"), and Jay named George Carlin, Lenny Bruce, and W.C. Fields ("I just loved 'Godfrey Daniel' ") as academic influences. "They were true professors of profanity," he said. By contrast, he brought up network television's broadcast of Spike Lee's "Do the Right Thing," in 1991. "Instead of 'motherfucker,' they showed all the people saying 'mikifiki,' which was just laughable," he said. Then, before hanging up, he said, "Have a good fucking day."

—*Ben McGrath*

ALL'S WELL DEPT.
SPA MAN

The most convoluted philosophical thinking outside of academe was taking place recently at the Global Spa Summit at the Waldorf-Astoria, with the purpose of fostering "thought leadership" in the forty-billion-dollar-a-year spa industry. One of the keynote speakers was Steve Case, the co-founder of America Online. He now owns a spa in Arizona called Miraval, whose motto is "Life in Balance." At Miraval, one can indulge in a wild-lime scalp rejuvenator ($65), a marine contouring body wrap ($165), and seven kinds of Oriental bodywork.

In his address, Case said, "Four years ago, I was pushed out of my comfort zone by the revelation of how to transform industries in need of change." He was wearing Dockers and a blue shirt open at the collar, and he seemed to be in an excellent zone as he continued, "It was a profound moment. I found balanced living. We are the modern healers. I don't just want to feel better. I want to *be* better." (Gerald Levin, who was Case's counterpart at Time Inc., during its merger with A.O.L., has also made a second career of self-improvement, running a holistic mental-health institute in Los Angeles.)

Case went on, "Remember when the man who started Nike was selling his sneakers from the back of a truck?" He paused. "I want that unique collaboration between real estate and spas. Destination spas! Wellness must go beyond just the facial and the massage. We are building what I call 'the Nike of Wellness.' " When he finished, the participants applauded, though some looked puzzled.

"He said nothing new," a short, sturdy delegate named Tatyana Meshkova said. "He pontificated. I am thirteen years in Moscow beauty business. I distribute the most chic formulations, all over Russia, to Belarus, even Latvia." Another Russian delegate agreed. "I do not care about sneakers," she said. "And facials *are* important for our market!"

While delegates headed off to panels such as "What the Investment Sector Wants the Spa Industry to Know," Case hung back. He wanted to make it clear that Miraval is more than a spa. "In fact, we don't really use the term 'spa,' " he said. "It conjures up pampering." (He did admit, though, to loving the Thai massage.) He talked about making Miraval into a "life-style brand," with such projects as Miraval Living in N.Y.C. ("It's a condo!"), a resort in Costa Rica, and a hybrid resort and primary-living community in Florida. "I met this morning with Oprah," Case said as he headed off to a meeting with a health-care executive. "I saw several C.E.O.s, too. I handle stress pretty well."

Ted Ning, a director at Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability, or LOHAS, as it's called, was talking to some delegates.

"Our new buzzword is 'authenticity,' " another LOHAS employee said. "There is a fundamental disconnect between questions of social justice and the people who sell organic tea and yoga mats, and these should be fiercely connected."

Ning nodded. "I connect," he said. "It's always nice to indulge in some self-giveback. I do daily yoga with my wife. We live in an energy-efficient house with solar-panel appliances. We use organic linens and towels. We try to ride bikes to work. Spa to me means 'pause and reconnect.' " He looked at his watch and said he had to run so he wouldn't be late for his free convention massage.

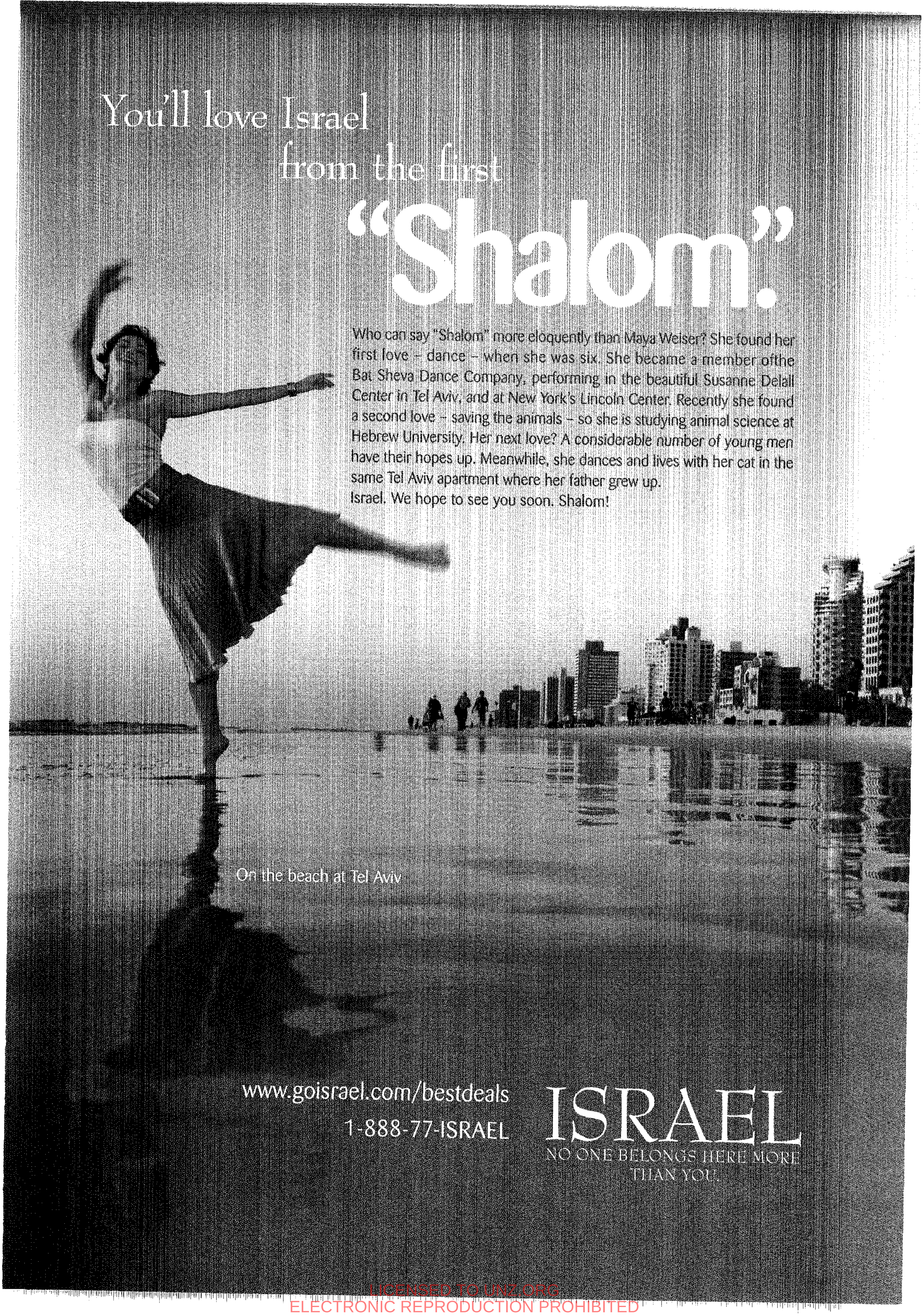
Jamie Waring, of Six Senses Spas, held out a coffee-table book entitled "Balancing Senses." "Look at this," he said. "Our Evason Hideaway at Hua Hin, in Thailand, modelled on a rural Thai village and built entirely from mud. Our therapists serve detox salads!"

"What about sustainability?" a young man asked, frowning.

"We changed over from fluffy towels to linens during massage, to use less water in laundering," Waring said.

Daniella Russell, from Cleopatra's Spa, in Dubai, said that she was an industry pioneer: "We were sidelined for ten years, but we broke into a closed society. We even have an operation in Kabul. In Dubai, we go to ladies in special rooms in the palaces. They love massage, and now they are not afraid to take off their clothes."

—*Lillian Ross*



You'll love Israel from the first "Shalom."

Who can say "Shalom" more eloquently than Maya Weiser? She found her first love – dance – when she was six. She became a member ofthe Bat Sheva Dance Company, performing in the beautiful Susanne Delall Center in Tel Aviv, and at New York's Lincoln Center. Recently she found a second love – saving the animals – so she is studying animal science at Hebrew University. Her next love? A considerable number of young men have their hopes up. Meanwhile, she dances and lives with her cat in the same Tel Aviv apartment where her father grew up.

Israel. We hope to see you soon. Shalom!

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THE FINANCIAL PAGE

THE SCIENCE OF SUCCESS

Last month, the publisher Simon & Schuster announced a partnership with a Web site called MediaPredict, which would use the collective judgment of readers to evaluate book proposals. The deal drew scorn from many, who saw it as evidence that publishers, in an era of stagnant sales, had so lost confidence in their own judgment that they were reduced to the methods of "American Idol." Asking readers to weigh in on a book's commercial prospects was a recipe for mediocrity, and the experiment was "doomed to fail." Yet even the idea's critics recognized that it was a response to a real problem: most books today are not economically successful, which means that much of the time and money that publishers invest in projects is wasted.

For years, publishers have accepted this as unavoidable. After all, in nearly every media business most products flop, and most of the profits come from a small number of huge successes. In the music industry, only ten per cent or so of recordings actually turn a profit. On network television each season, most new shows fail. And in Hollywood, according to the economist Art De Vany, six per cent of films account for the bulk of the industry's profits. Media companies have learned, accordingly, to diversify their bets and, increasingly, to share their risk with others. (Hollywood studios, for instance, now often bring in outside investors on big projects, limiting their potential downside.) But the process of predicting whether a product will be a hit remains remarkably haphazard and erratic.

Many people argue that it's foolish to expect otherwise, and that no science of success is possible. In the famous words of the screenwriter William Goldman, "Nobody knows anything." The fate of a book or a movie, the argument goes, is determined by too many factors to be predictable—advertising, reviews, word of mouth, luck, and, in the case of big hits, a simple desire to see what all the fuss is about. De Vany, for instance, says that the box-office performance of Hollywood films is "chaotic" in the mathematical sense of the term. Three Columbia sociologists recently found something similar in a series of online experiments in which people were divided into eight groups, asked to listen to songs by unknown artists, rate them, and then decide which ones they'd like to download—after being told how often others had downloaded the songs. The highest-rated songs, it turned out, were not always the most frequently downloaded. And in each group a different song ended up topping the charts. In the laboratory, at least, success appeared to be essentially random.

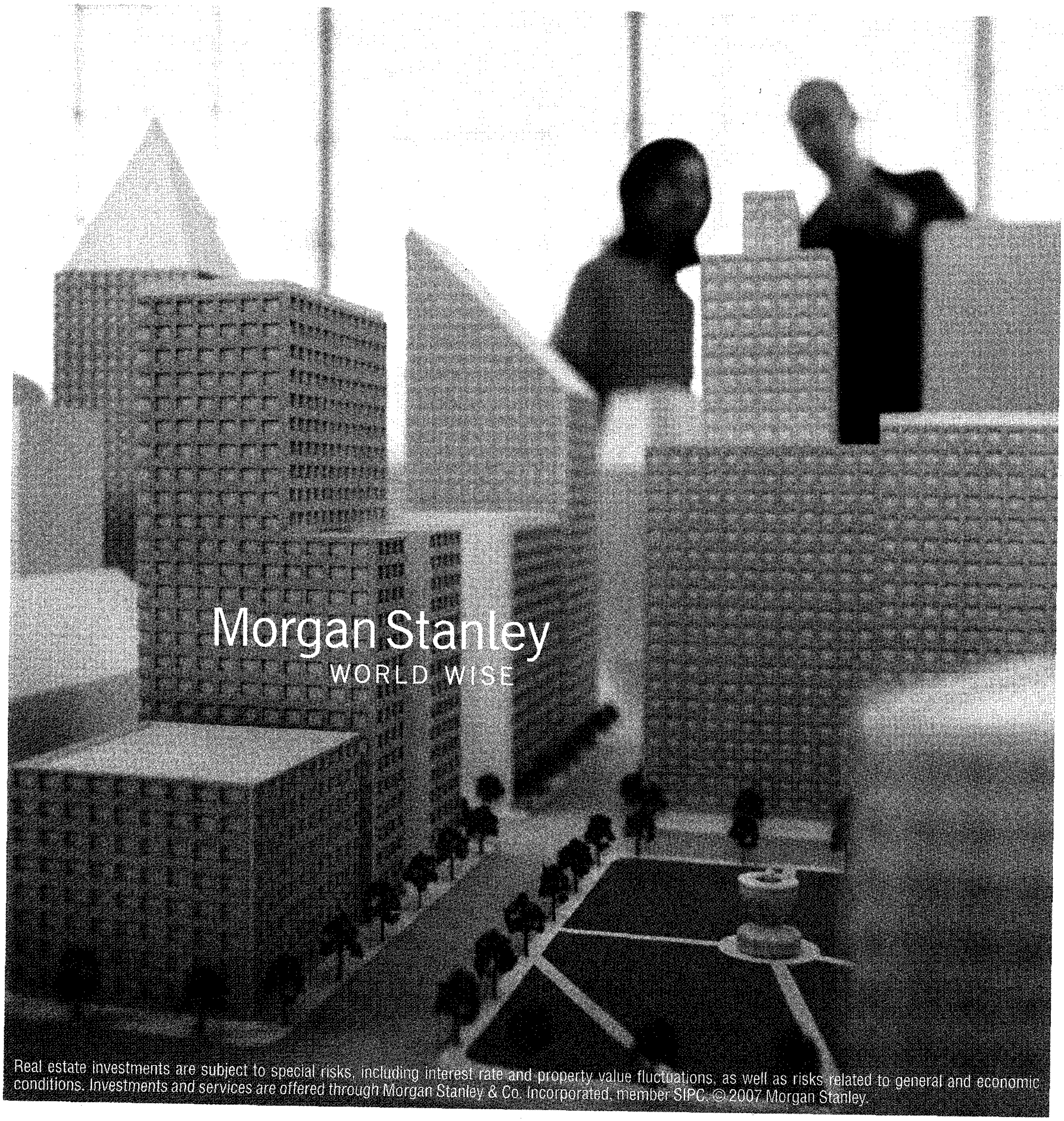
MediaPredict, however, is wagering that in the real world success is, at least in part, predictable, and it follows a model that, over the past decade, has proved surprisingly effective in forecasting a wide range of events: the prediction market. Prediction markets function like futures markets, except that, instead of betting on the future performance of a company or a commodity, people can bet (often with play money) on things like election outcomes, current events, and product sales. Rather than relying on the gut instincts of a single decision-maker, prediction markets tap the collective intelligence of everyone playing the market. The most successful media prediction market is the Hollywood Stock Exchange, in which traders collectively forecast the box-office performance of Hollywood films, Oscar nominations and results, and the performance of individual actors, with striking accuracy. The market on average picks more than eighty per cent of Oscar nominees correctly, and hasn't missed more than one Oscar winner in the past four years. More important, it has also done a good job of predicting box-office performance. According to a study by Anita Elberse, a professor at Harvard Business School, the market's forecasts are off, on average, by sixteen per cent—far from perfect, but a track record that most studio marketing departments would be proud of.

It isn't just Hollywood, either. A British firm called Brainjuicer has been using collective intelligence to research the prospects of everyday consumer products, and its findings suggest that such techniques can forecast more accurately and subtly than traditional consumer research methods, which have a reputation for producing mediocre results. For instance, prediction markets avoid many of the faults of focus groups, which tend to be dominated by the loudest and most opinionated people, to be driven toward consensus decision, and to discourage disagreement, making them of limited usefulness. ("Seinfeld," famously, was a complete bust with focus groups.) Prediction markets, by contrast, are competitive environments, and so they encourage diversity of opinion, minimize people's influence on one another, and force people to think not only about their own tastes but about those of consumers as a body.

The collective intelligence of consumers isn't perfect—it's just better than other forecasting tools. The catch is that to get good answers from consumers you need to ask the right kinds of questions; asking the market to predict how many copies a book will sell, which requires predicting how a wide readership will behave, is better than asking the market to predict which manuscript will get a book deal, which requires predicting the decisions of a small number of editors. (The Simon & Schuster experiment with MediaPredict, unfortunately, focusses more on the latter.) And you need a critical mass of people to participate. It'll take a while to work out the kinks, but in the long run these markets are tools that few media companies can afford to ignore. Nobody knows anything. But everybody, it turns out, may know something.

—*James Surowiecki*

MARC ROSENTHAL



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REFLECTIONS

THIS OLD HOUSE

The heart is a lonely menagerie.

BY DAVID SEDARIS

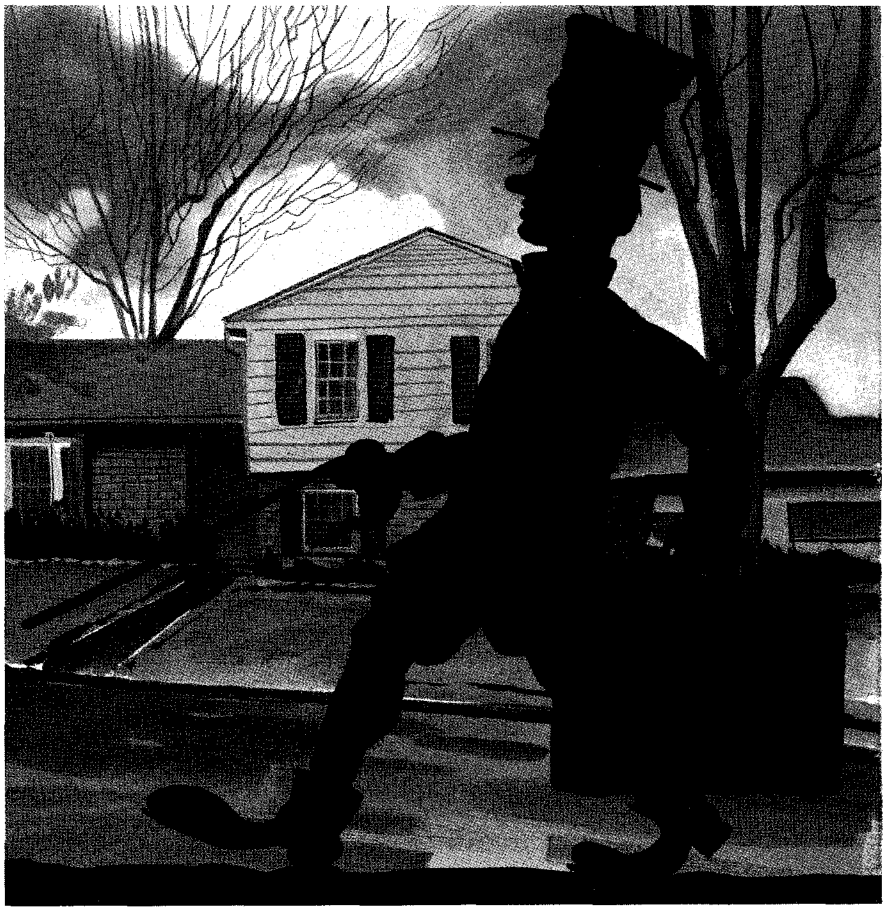
When it came to decorating her home, my mother was nothing if not practical. She learned early on that children will destroy whatever you put in front of them, so for most of my youth our furniture was chosen for its durability rather than for its beauty. The one exception was the dining-room set, which my parents bought shortly after they were married. Should a guest eye the buffet for longer than a second, my mother would notice and jump in to prompt a compliment. "You like it?" she'd ask. "It's Scandinavian!" This, we learned, was the name of a region—a cold and forsaken place where people stayed indoors and plotted the death of knobs.

The buffet, like the table, was an exercise in elegant simplicity. The set was made of teak, and had been finished with tung oil. This brought out the character of the wood, allowing it, at certain times of day, to practically glow. Nothing was more beautiful than our dining room, especially after my father covered the walls with cork. It wasn't the kind you use on bulletin boards but something coarse and dark, the color of damp pine mulch. Light the candles beneath the chafing dish, lay the table with the charcoal-textured dinnerware we hardly ever used, and you had yourself a real picture.

This dining room, I liked to think, was what my family was all about. Throughout my childhood, it brought me great pleasure, but then I turned sixteen and decided that I didn't like it anymore. What happened was a television show, a weekly drama about a close-knit family in Depression-era Virginia. The family didn't have a blender or a country-club membership, but they did have one another—that and a really great house, an old one, built in the twenties or something. All their bedrooms had slanted clapboard walls and oil lamps that bathed everything in fragile golden light. I wouldn't have used the word "romantic," but that's how I thought of it.

"You think those prewar years were cozy?" my father once asked. "Try getting up at 5 A.M. to sell newspapers on the snow-covered streets. That's what I did and it stunk to high heaven."

"Well," I told him, "I'm just sorry that you weren't able to appreciate it."



ZOHAR LAZAR

Like anyone nostalgic for a time he didn't live through, I chose to weed out the little inconveniences: polio, say, or the thought of eating stewed squirrel. The world was simply grander back then, somehow more civilized, and nicer to look at. Wasn't it crushing to live in a house no older than our cat?

"No," my father said. "Not at all."

My mother felt the same: "Boxed in by neighbors, having to walk through my parents' bedroom in order to reach the kitchen. If you think that was fun, you never saw your grandfather with his teeth out."

They were more than willing to leave their pasts behind them, and reacted strongly when my sister Gretchen and I began dragging it home. "The *Andrews* Sisters?" my father groaned. "What the hell do you want to listen to them for?"

When I started buying clothes from Goodwill, he really went off, and for good reason, probably. The suspenders and knickers were bad enough, but when I added a top hat he planted himself in the doorway and physically prevented me from leaving the house. "It doesn't make sense," I remember him saying. "That hat with those pants, worn with the damn platform shoes . . ." His speech temporarily left him, and he found himself waving his hands, no doubt wishing that they held magic wands. "You're just . . . a mess is what you are."

The way I saw it, the problem wasn't my outfit but my context. Sure I looked out of place beside a Scandinavian buffet, but put me in the proper environment and I'd undoubtedly fit right in.

"The environment you're looking for is called a psychiatric hospital," my father said. "Now give me the damn hat before I burn it off."

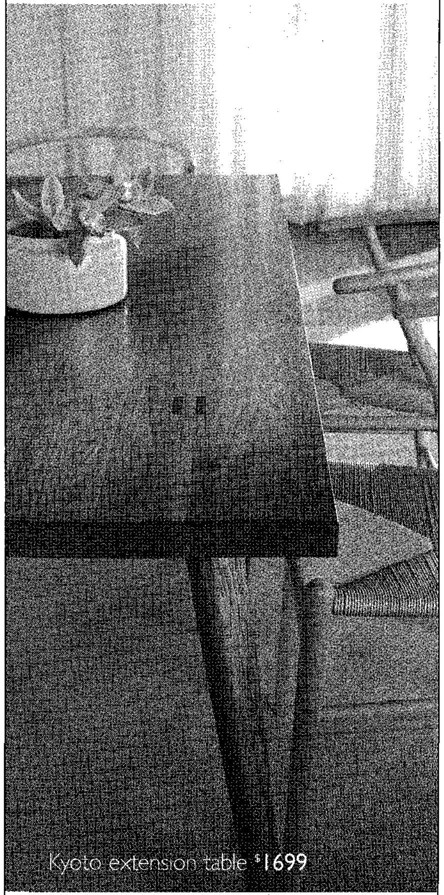
I longed for a home where history was respected—and, four years later, I finally found one. This was in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. I'd gone there to visit an old friend from high school—and because I was between jobs, and had no real obligations, I decided to stay for a while and maybe look for some dishwashing work. The restaurant that hired me was a local institution, all dark wood and windowpanes the size of playing cards. The food was O.K., but what the place was really known for was the classical music that the man in charge, someone named Byron, pumped into the dining room. Anyone else might have thrown in a compilation tape, but he took his responsibilities very seriously, and planned each meal as if it were an evening at Tanglewood. I hoped that dishwashing might lead to a job in the dining room, busing tables, and, eventually, waiting on them, but I kept these aspirations to myself. Dressed as I was, in jodhpurs and a smoking jacket, I should have been grateful that I was hired at all.

After getting my first paycheck, I scouted out a place to live. My two requirements were that it be cheap and close to where I worked, and on both counts I succeeded. I couldn't have dreamed that it would also be old and untouched, an actual boarding house. The owner was adjusting her "Room for Rent" sign as I passed, and our eyes locked in an expression that said, "Hark, stranger, you are one of me!" Both of us looked like figures from a scratchy newsreel: me the unemployed factory worker in tortoiseshell safety glasses and a tweed overcoat two sizes too large, and her, the feisty widow lady, taking in boarders in order to make ends meet. "Excuse me," I called, "but is that hat from the forties?"

The woman put her hands to her head and adjusted what looked like a fistful of cherries spilling from a velveteen saucer. "Why, yes it is," she said. "How canny of you to notice." I'll say that her name was Rosemary Dowd, and, as she introduced herself, I tried to guess her age. What foxed me was her makeup, which was on the heavy side, and involved a great deal of peach-colored powder. From a distance, her hair looked white, but now I could see that it was streaked with yellow, almost randomly, like snow that had been peed on. If she seemed somewhat mannish, it was the fault of her clothing rather than her features. Both her jacket and her blouse were kitted out with shoulder pads, and when they were worn together she could barely fit through the door. This might be a problem for others, but Rosemary didn't get out much. And why would she want to?

I hadn't even crossed the threshold when I agreed to take the room. What sold me was the look of the place. Some might have found it shabby—"a dump," my father would eventually call it—but, unless you ate them, a few thousand paint chips never hurt anyone. The same could be said for the groaning front porch and the occasional missing shingle. It was easy to imagine that the house, set as it was, on the lip of a student parking lot, had dropped from the sky, like Dorothy's in "The Wizard of Oz," but with a second story. Then there was the inside, which was even better. The front door opened into a living room, or, as Rosemary called it, "the parlor." The word was old-fashioned, but fitting. Velvet curtains framed the windows. The walls were papered in a faint, floral pattern, and doilies were everywhere, laid flat on tabletops and sagging like cobwebs from the backs of overstuffed chairs. My eyes moved from one thing to another, and, like my mother with her dining-room set, Rosemary took note of where they landed. "I see you like my davenport," she said, and, "You don't find lamps like that anymore. It's a genuine Stephanie."

It came as no surprise that she bought and sold antiques, or "dabbled" in them, as she said. Every available surface was crowded with objects: green-glass candy dishes, framed photographs of movie stars, cigarette boxes with monogrammed lids. An umbrella leaned against an open steamer trunk, and, when I observed that its handle was Bakelite, my new landlady unpinned her saucer of cherries and pre-



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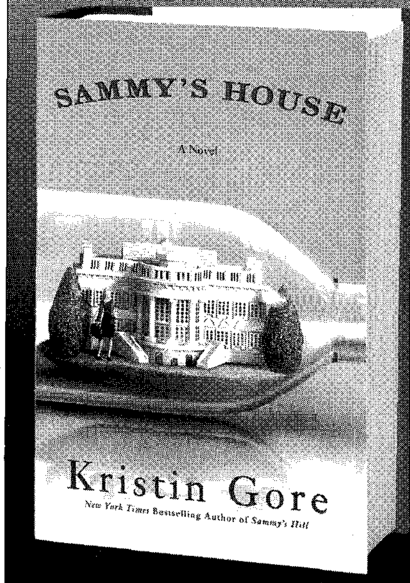

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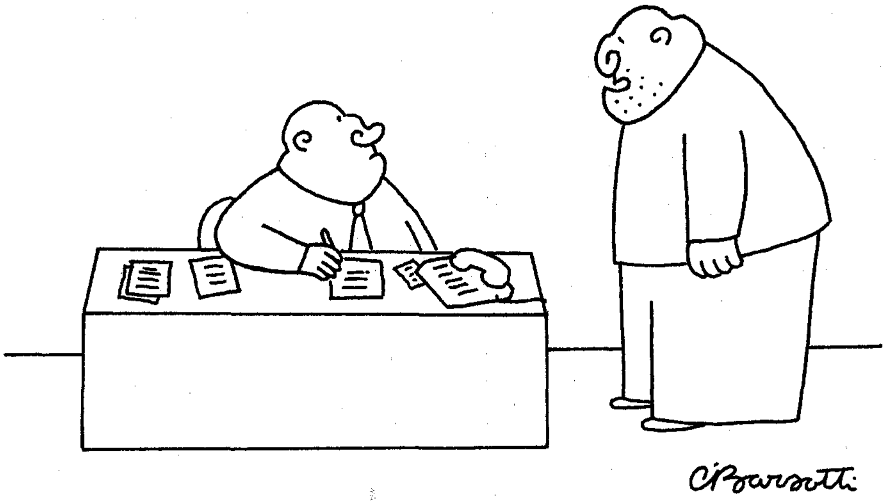


"Lose the tie, Vinnie—we ain't going legit after all."

• •

dicted that the two of us were going to get along famously.

And for many months we did. Rosemary lived on the ground floor, in a set of closed-off rooms she referred to as her chambers. The door that led to them opened onto the parlor, and when I stood outside I could sometimes hear her television. This seemed to me a kind of betrayal, like putting a pool table inside the Great Pyramid, but she assured me that the set was an old one—"My 'Model Tee Vee,'" she called it.

My room was upstairs, and in letters home I described it as "hunky-dory." How else to capture my peeling, buckled wallpaper, and the way that it brought everything together. The bed, the desk, the brass-plated floor lamp: it was all there waiting for me, and though certain pieces had seen better days—the guest chair, for instance, was missing its seat—at least everything was uniformly old. From my window I could see the parking lot and, beyond that, the busy road leading to the restaurant. It pleased Rosemary that I worked in such a venerable place. "It suits you," she said. "And don't feel bad about washing dishes. I think even Gable did it for a while."

"Did he?"

I felt so clever, catching all her references. The other boarder didn't even know who Charlie Chan was, and the guy was half Korean! I'd see him in the hall from time to time—a chemistry major, I think he was. There was a third room as well, but owing to some water damage Rosemary was having a hard time renting it. "Not that I care so much," she told me. "In my business, it's more about quality than quantity."

I moved in at the beginning of January, and throughout that winter my life felt like a beautiful dream. I'd come home at the end of the day and Rosemary would be sitting in the parlor, both of us fully costumed. "Aha!" she'd say. "Just the young man I was looking for." Then she'd pull out some new treasure she'd bought at an estate sale and explain what made it so valuable: "On most of the later Fire King loaf pans, the trademark helmet is etched rather than embossed."

The idea was that we were different, not like the rest of America, with its Fuzzbusters and shopping malls and rotating showerheads. "If it's not new and shiny, they don't want anything to do with it," Rosemary would complain. "Give them the Liberty Bell and they'd bitch about the crack. That's how folks are nowadays. I've seen it."

There was a radio station in Raleigh that broadcast old programs, and sometimes at night, when the reception was good, we'd sit on the davenport and listen to Jack Benny or "Fibber McGee and Molly." Rosemary might mend a worn Wac uniform with her old-timey sewing kit, while I'd stare into the fireplace and wish that it still worked. Maybe we'd leaf through some old *Look* magazines. Maybe the wind would rattle the windows and we'd draw a quilt over our laps and savor the heady scent of mothballs.

I hoped that our lives would continue this way forever, but inevitably the past came knocking. Not the good kind that was collectible but the bad kind that had arthritis. One afternoon in early April, I returned home from work to find a lost-looking white-haired woman sitting in the parlor. Her fingers were stiff and gnarled, so rather than shake hands I offered a little salute. "Sister Sykes" was how she introduced herself. I thought that was maybe what they called her in church, but then Rosemary walked out of her chambers and told me through gritted teeth that this was a professional name.

"Mother here was a psychic," she explained. "Had herself a tarot deck and a crystal ball and told people whatever stupid malarkey they wanted to hear."

"That I did," Sister Sykes said, chuckling.

You'd think that someone who occasionally wore a turban herself would like having a psychic as a mom, but Rosemary was over it. "If she'd forecast thirty years ago that I'd wind up having to take care of her, I would have put my head in the oven and killed myself," she told me.

When June rolled around, the chemistry student graduated, and his room was rented to a young man I'll call Chaz, who worked on a road-construction crew. "You know those guys that hold the flags?" he said. "Well, that's me. That's what I do."

His face, like his name, was chiselled and memorable, and, after deciding that he was too handsome, I began to examine him for flaws. The split lower lip only added to his appeal, so I moved on to his hair, which had clearly been blow-dried, and to the strand of turquoise pebbles visible through his unbuttoned shirt.

"What are you looking at?" he asked, and before I had a chance to blush he started telling me about his ex-girlfriend. They'd lived together for six months, in a little apartment behind Fowler's grocery store, but then she cheated on him with someone named Robby, an asshole who went to U.N.C. and majored in fucking up other people's lives. "You're not one of those college snobs, are you?" he asked.

I probably should have said "No," rather than "Not presently."

"What did you study?" he asked. "Bank robbing?"

"Excuse me?"

"Your clothes," he said. "You and that lady downstairs look like those people from 'Bonnie and Clyde,' not the stars but the other ones. The ones who fuck everything up."

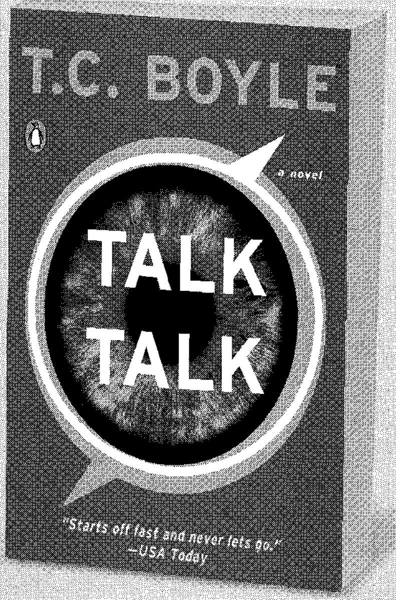
"Yes, well, we're individuals."

"Individual freaks," he said, and then he laughed, suggesting that there were no hard feelings. "Anyway, I don't have time to stand around and jaw. A friend and me are hitting the bars."

He'd do this every time: start a conversation and end it abruptly, as if it had been me who was running his mouth. Before Chaz moved in, the upstairs was fairly quiet. Now I heard the sound of his radio through the wall, a rock station that made it all the harder to pretend I was living in gentler times. When he was bored, he'd knock on my door and demand that I give him a cigarette. Then he'd stand there and smoke it, complaining that my room was too clean, my sketches were too sketchy, my old-fashioned bathrobe was too old-fashioned. "Well, enough of this," he'd say. "I have my own life to lead." Three or four times a night this would happen.

As Chaz changed life on the second floor, Sister Sykes changed it on the first. I went to check my mail one morning and found Rosemary dressed just like anyone else her age: no hat or costume jewelry, just a pair of slacks and a ho-hum blouse with unpadded shoulders. She wasn't wearing makeup, either, and had neglected to curl her hair. "What can I tell you?" she said. "That kind of dazzle takes time, and I just don't seem to have any lately." The parlor, which had always been just so, had gone downhill as well. Now there were cans of iced-tea mix sitting on the Victrola, and boxed pots and pans parked in the corner where the credenza used to be. There was no more listening to Jack Benny, because that was Sister Sykes's bath time. "The queen bee," Rosemary called her.

Later that summer, just after the Fourth of July, I came downstairs and found a pair of scuffed white suitcases



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beside the front door. I hoped that someone was on his way out—Chaz, specifically—but it appeared that the luggage was coming rather than going. "Meet my daughter," Rosemary said, this with the same grudging tone she'd used to introduce her mother. The young woman—I'll call her Ava—took a rope of hair from the side of her head and stuck it in her mouth. She was a skinny thing, and very pale, dressed in jeans and a Western-style shirt. "In her own little world," Sister Sykes said.

Rosemary told me later that her daughter had just been released from a mental institution, and though I tried to act surprised, I don't think I was very convincing. It was like she was on acid almost, the way she'd sit and examine something long after it had lost its mystery: an ashtray, a dried-up moth, Chaz's blow-dryer in the upstairs bathroom—everything got equal attention, including my room. There were no lockable doors on the second floor. The keys had been lost years earlier, so Ava just wandered in whenever she felt like it. I'd come home after a full day of work—my clothes smelling of wet garbage, my shoes squishy with dishwater—and find her sitting on my bed, or standing like a zombie behind my door.

"You scared me," I'd say, and she'd stare into my face until I turned away.

The situation at Rosemary's sank to a new low when Chaz lost his job. "I was overqualified," he told me, but, as the days passed, his story became more elaborate, and he felt an ever-increasing urge to share it with me. He started knocking more often, not caring that it was 6 A.M. or well after midnight. "And another thing . . ." he'd say, stringing ten separate conversations into one. He got into a fight that left him with a black eye. He threw his radio out the window and then scattered the broken pieces throughout the parking lot.

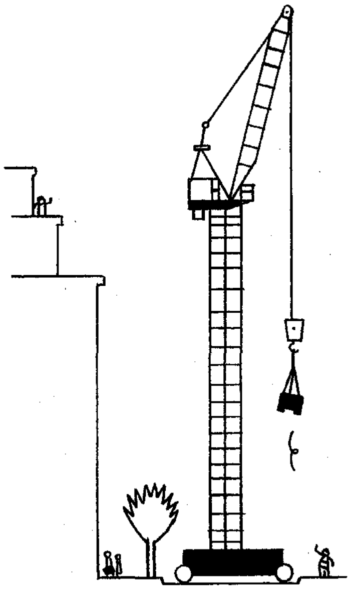
Late one evening, he came to my door, and when I opened it he grabbed me around the waist and lifted me off the floor. This might sound innocent, but his was not a celebratory gesture. We hadn't won a game or been granted a stay of execution, and carefree people don't call you a "hand puppet of the Dark Lord" when they pick you up without your consent. I knew then that there was something seriously wrong with the guy, but I couldn't put a name to it. I guess I thought that Chaz was too good-looking to be crazy.

When he started slipping notes under my door, I decided it was time to update my thinking. "Now I'm going to die and come back on the same day," one of them read. It wasn't just the messages but the writing itself that spooked me, the letters all jittery and butting up against one another. Some of his notes included diagrams, and flames rendered in red ink. When he started leaving them for Rosemary, she called him down to the parlor and told him he had to leave. For a minute or two, he seemed to take it well, but then he thought better of it and threatened to return as a vapor.

"Did he say 'viper'?" Sister Sykes asked.

Chaz's parents came a week later, and asked if any of us had seen him. "He's a schizophrenic, you see, but sometimes he goes off his medication."

I'd thought that Rosemary would be sympathetic, but she was sick to death of mental illness, just as she was sick of old people, and of having to take in boarders to make ends meet. "If he was screwy you should have told me before he moved in," she said to Chaz's father. "I can't have people like that running through my house. What with these antiques, it's just not safe." The man's eyes wandered around the parlor, and through them I saw what he did: a dirty room full of junk. It had never been anything more than that, but for some reason—the heat, maybe, or the couple's heavy, almost contagious sense of despair—every gouge and smudge jumped violently into focus. More depressing still was the thought that I belonged here, that I fit in.



For years, the university had been trying to buy Rosemary's property. Representatives would come to the door, and her accounts of these meetings seemed torn from a late-night movie: "So I said to him, 'But don't you see? This isn't just a house. It's my home, sir. My home.'"

They didn't want the building, of course, just the land. With every passing semester, it became more valuable, and she was smart to hold out for as long as she did. I don't know what their final offer was, but Rosemary accepted it. She signed the papers with a vintage fountain pen, and was still holding it when she came to give me the news. This was in August, and I was lying on my floor, making a sweat angel. A part of me was sad that the house was being sold, but another, bigger part—the part that loved air-conditioning—was more than ready to move on. It was pretty clear that as far as the restaurant was concerned I was never going to advance beyond dishwashing. Then, too, it was hard to live in a college town and not go to college. The students I saw out my window were a constant reminder that I was just spinning my wheels, and I was beginning to imagine how I would feel in another ten years, when they started looking like kids to me.

A few days before I left, Ava and I sat together on the front porch. It had just begun to rain when she turned and asked, "Did I ever tell you about my daddy?"

This was more than I'd ever heard her say, and before continuing she took off her shoes and socks and set them on the floor beside her. Then she drew a hank of hair into her mouth, and told me that her father had died of a heart attack. "Said he didn't feel well and an hour later he just plunked over."

I asked a few follow-up questions, and learned that he had died on November 19, 1963. Three days after that, the funeral was held, and while riding from the church to the cemetery Ava looked out the window and noticed that everyone she passed was crying. "Old people, college students, even the colored men at the gas station—the soul brothers, or whatever we're supposed to call them now."

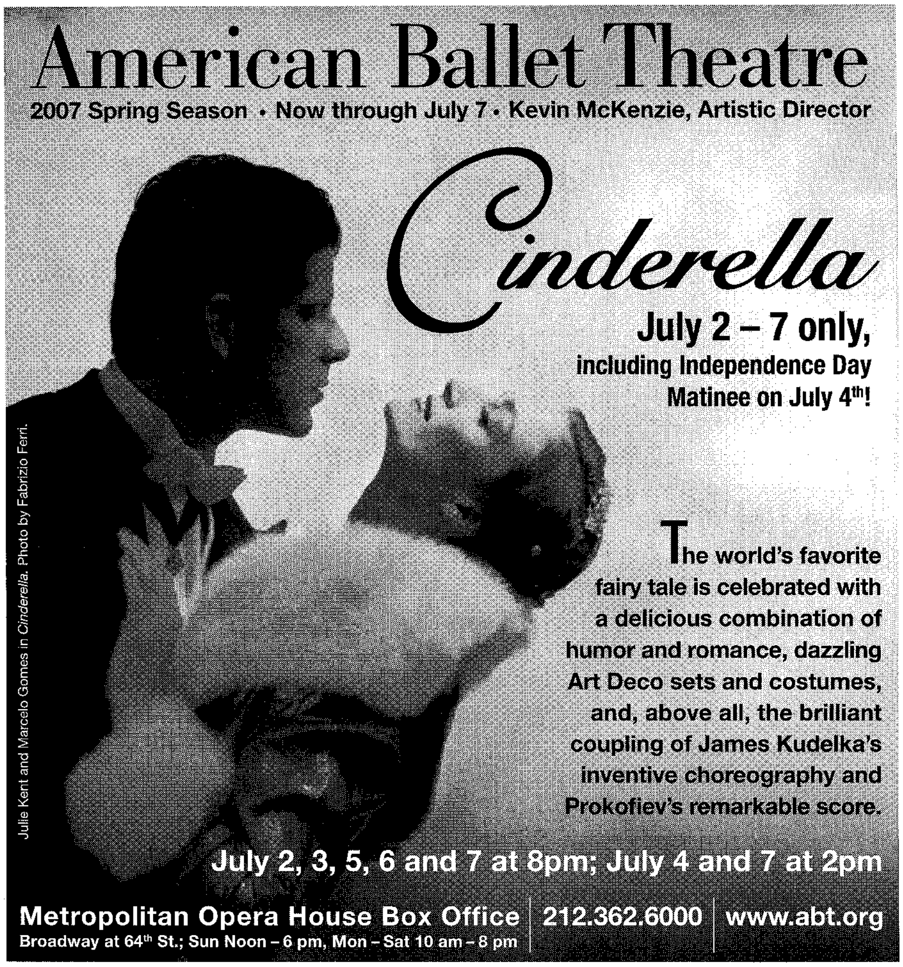
It was such an outmoded term, I just had to use it myself. "How did the soul brothers know your father?"

"That's just it," she said. "No one told us until after the burial that Kennedy had been shot. It happened when we were in the church, so that's what everyone was so upset about. The President, not my father."

She then put her socks back on and walked into the parlor, leaving both me and her shoes behind.

When I'd tell people about this later, they'd say, "Oh, come on," because it was all too much, really. An arthritic psychic, a ramshackle house, and either two or four crazy people, depending on your tolerance for hats. Harder to swallow is that each of us was such a cliché. It was as if you'd taken a Carson McCullers novel, mixed it with a Tennessee Williams play, and dumped all the sets and characters into a single box. I didn't even add that Sister Sykes used to own a squirrel monkey, as it only amounted to overkill. Even the outside world seems suspect here: the leafy college town, the restaurant with its classical music.

I never presumed that Kennedy's death was responsible for Ava's breakdown. Plenty of people endure startling coincidences with no lasting aftereffects, so I imagine that her troubles started years earlier. As for Chaz, I later learned that it was fairly common for schizophrenics to go off their medication. I'd think it strange that the boarding house attracted both him and me, but that's what cheap places do—draw in people with no money. An apartment of my own was unthinkable at that time of my life, and, even if I'd found an affordable one, it wouldn't have satisfied my fundamental need: to live in a communal past, or what I imagined the past to be like—a world full of antiques. What I could never fathom, and still can't, really, is that at one point all those things were new—the wheezing Victrola, the hulking davenport. How were they any different from the eight-track tape player, or my parents' Scandinavian dining-room set? Given enough time, I guess, anything can look good. All it has to do is survive. ♦



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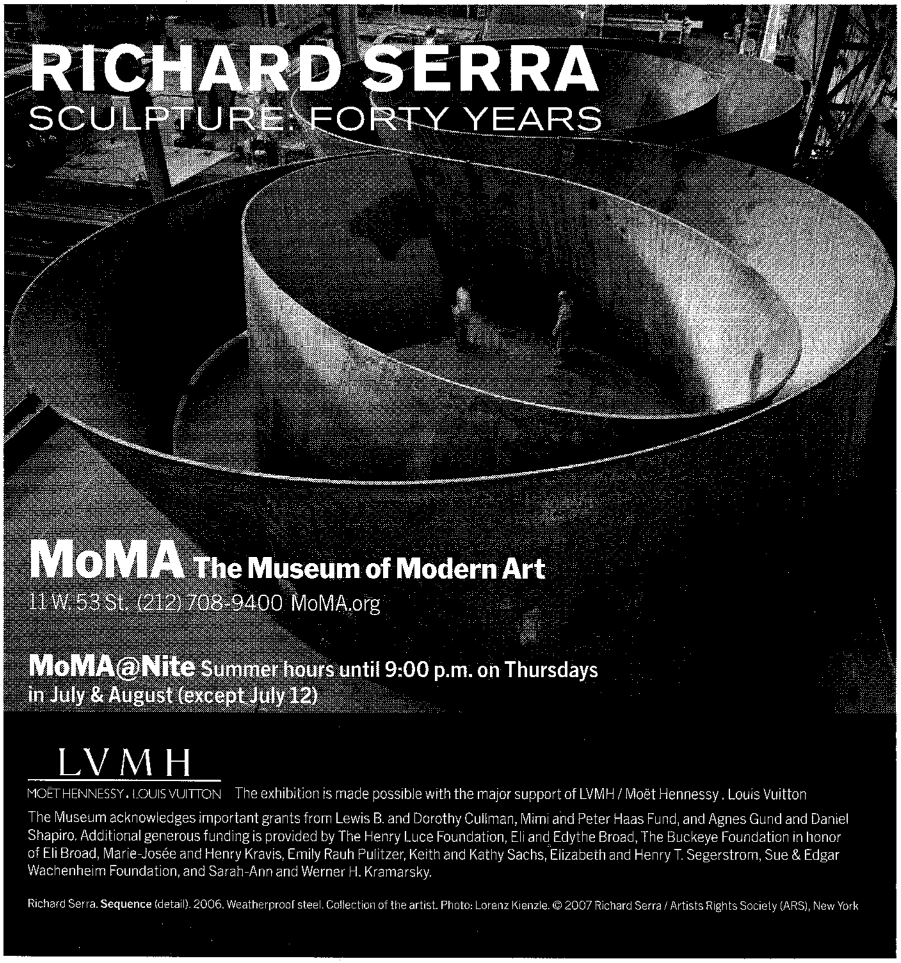

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The Museum acknowledges important grants from Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman, Mimi and Peter Haas Fund, and Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro. Additional generous funding is provided by The Henry Luce Foundation, Eli and Edythe Broad, The Buckeye Foundation in honor of Eli Broad, Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis, Emily Rauh Pulitzer, Keith and Kathy Sachs, Elizabeth and Henry T. Segerstrom, Sue & Edgar Wachenheim Foundation, and Sarah-Ann and Werner H. Kramarsky.

Richard Serra. **Sequence** (detail). 2006. Weatherproof steel. Collection of the artist. Photo: Lorenz Kienzle. © 2007 Richard Serra / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

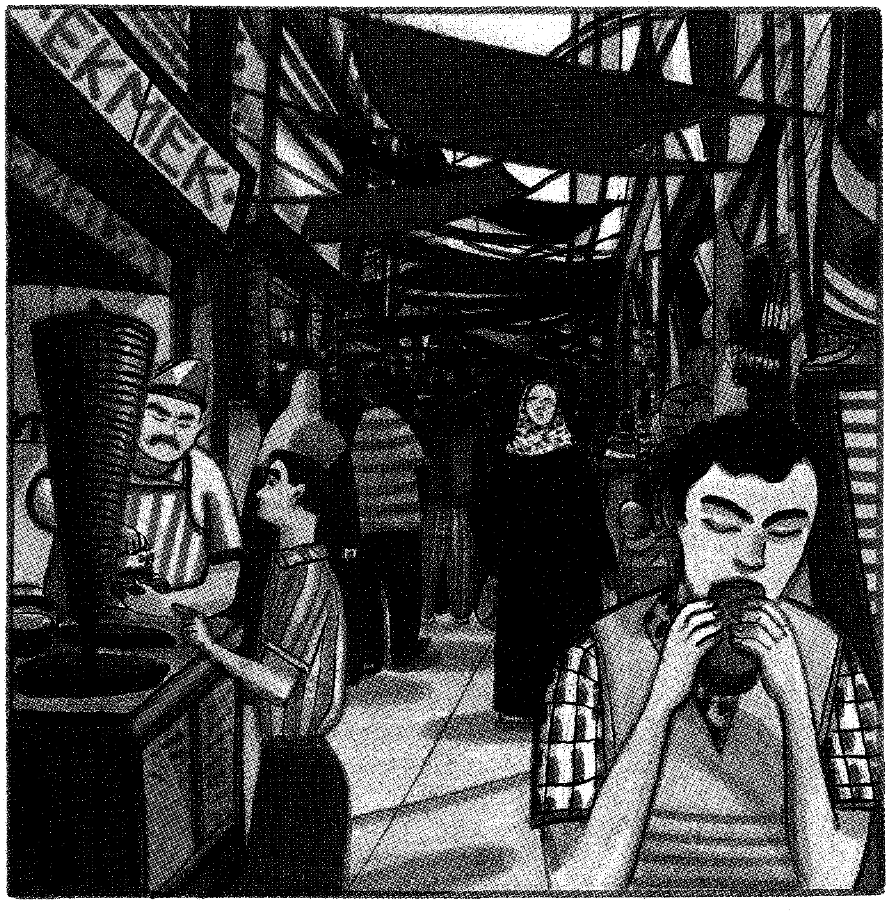
PERSONAL HISTORY

FORBIDDEN FARE

When street food came to Istanbul.

BY ORHAN PAMUK

It was a cold afternoon in Istanbul, in January, 1964. I was standing just outside a buffet restaurant that occupied the ground floor of a Greek apartment building in a corner of Taksim Square (which was much smaller and more run-down then, because the old buildings hadn't yet been demolished to open up lanes for the avenues). I was awash in fear but also euphoric: in my hand was a frankfurter sandwich I'd just bought from the buffet. I took a big bite, but as I stood there, chewing away amid the great chaos of the city, watching the circling trolleybuses and the swarms of shoppers and young people rushing off to the movies, my joy left me: I had been caught. My brother was heading toward me down the sidewalk, and he had seen me. As he came closer, I could tell instantly that he was thrilled to have caught me committing a crime. "What do you think you're doing, eating that frankfurter sandwich?" he asked with a supercilious smile. I lowered my head and finished the sandwich guiltily. At home that night, it was just as I expected: my brother told my mother about my transgression in a lofty voice tinged with compassion. Eating frankfurter sandwiches on the street was one of the many things that my mother forbade us to do.



To buy a frankfurter was to leave behind Islamic tradition and embrace modern life.

LORENZO MATTOTTI

Until the early sixties, the frankfurter sandwich was known to Istanbullus as a special dish that was served only in German beer halls. From the sixties on, however, thanks to the arrival of compact butane stoves, to the decrease in the cost of domestically produced refrigerators, and to the opening of Coca-Cola and Pepsi factories in Turkey, "sandwich buffets" were suddenly opening up everywhere, and what they offered was soon an integral part of the national diet. Back then, when the *döner* sandwich (known in the United States by its Greek name, the gyro) had yet to be invented, the frankfurter sandwich was the height of fashion, and a staple for those of us who had taken to eating on the street. We'd gaze through the glass at the dark-red sauce that had been simmering all day and select one of the frankfurters wallowing in it like happy water buffalo in the mud; we'd point it out to the man with tongs in his hand and then wait impatiently for him to assemble the sandwich. He would, on request, slip white bread or a thin bun into the toaster, then spread the red sauce on it, place the frankfurter, pickles, and tomatoes on top of it, and finally add a layer of mustard. There were some fancy buffets that also offered the mayonnaise once known as Russian salad but now referred to as American salad because of the Cold War.

Most of these buffets and sandwich shops opened first in Beyoğlu, the old European quarter, and, having changed the fast-food-eating habits of the local residents, went on, in the next twenty years, to do the same for all Istanbullus and all of Turkey. The first toasters arrived in Istanbul in the mid-nineteen-fifties, and at about the same time bakeries began to produce special sliced white bread for grilled cheese sandwiches. Once grilled cheese sandwiches had become a staple, the buffets of Beyoğlu went on to reinvent the hamburger. Many of the first big sandwich shops of the era had names that invoked other lands and magical realms, such as the Atlantic and the Pacific; their walls were decorated with paintings of the heavenly islands of the Far East, and each establishment offered a very different hamburger. This suggests that Turkey's first hamburgers were, like so much in Istanbul, a synthesis of East and West. The hamburger—whose name evoked Europe and America for a young man in Beyoğlu—was actually a sandwich that a nice head-scarf-wearing matron in the kitchen, a woman who took pride in feeding young men, had made according to her own recipe, with her own fine hands.

And this was what my mother had

taken against: with great disgust, she declared that the meat in these hamburgers was from "unknown parts of unknown animals" and she forbade us to eat not only hamburgers but frankfurters, salami, and garlic sausages, too, since, according to her, it was impossible to know which part of the animal any of them came from. Sausages and hamburgers of uncertain origin were the stuff of nightmares not only for my mother but for all middle-class mothers. This was why street venders hawking garlic-sausage sandwiches would always call out "Apik! Apik!"—a reference to the Apikoğlu brand of sausages, which was famous for never using horse or donkey meat.

Let me confess that the tastiest sandwiches of my life were the ones I bought from the venders who served up bread stuffed with meatballs and garlic sausage outside the sports halls and stadiums where I watched football and basketball games. My interest in football had less to do with the adventures of the ball and the team than it did with the crowd and the sense of occasion; while I waited in line for my ticket, the thick blue smoke from the meatball venders would seep into my nose, my hair, and my jacket until it was impossible to resist. When we were at the stadium together, my brother and I, after promising not to mention it at home, would each buy a sausage sandwich. The sausage had been roasted over the coals for so long that it was like leather, stuffed into a hunk of bread with a piece of onion. It went very well with a glass of the yogurt drink *ayran*.

From the time Istanbullus enjoyed their first toasted sandwiches outside their first buffets, they were bombarded with advertisements for the sausage and frankfurter companies whose products were used in those sandwiches. One of the first of these advertisements, which was also one of the first domestically produced cartoons shown in cinemas, is forever lodged in my mind: Various cows with beatific expressions parachute down from the sky and into the mouth of a gigantic meat grinder. But what's this? A sweet, toothy, craftily smiling donkey has somehow infiltrated the herd of airborne cows. The audience grows uneasy as the donkey approaches the mouth of the meat grinder, but just before he is turned into sausage meat a large fist emerges

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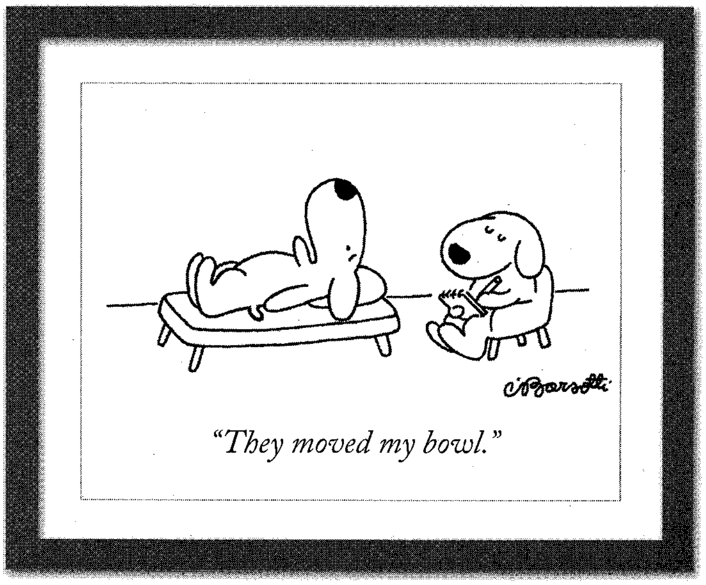

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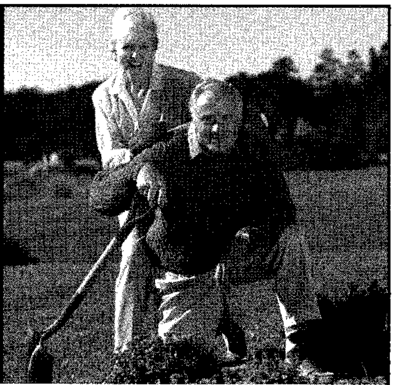

from the grinder and sends the donkey flying, and a female voice assures us that we can buy such-and-such brand of sausage with "peace of mind."

But in Istanbul, as elsewhere, people ate street food of uncertain origins not just because they were short of time, money, or options but also, in my view, in order to escape that "peace of mind," to leave behind Islamic tradition—in which ideas about food are embedded in ideas about mothers, and women in general, and sacred privacy—and to embrace modern life and become city-dwellers. Though it may have been "modern" to eat food made by unknown hands on dirty streets far from home, those of us who seized on this habit at that moment in time still found ways to avoid the solitary individualism that modernity so often involves. Because this act of will required courage, the first to take the plunge were students, the unemployed, the disenchanted, and those fools who were ready to stuff anything into their mouths for the sake of novelty. Such crowds gathered on Istiklal Avenue in Beyoğlu, near lycées and universities, at stadium entrances, and in the city's poorest neighborhoods; the pleasure people felt in finding themselves thus assembled meant that eating habits changed almost overnight, not just in Istanbul but in the entire country. In 1964, at the Turkey-Bulgaria football match, which was the first held at Galatasaray's Ali Sami Yen Stadium, the pushing and shoving in the cheap open stands set a sandwich vender's stove on fire, and before my terrified eyes the crowds that had been happily eating frankfurter sandwiches as they waited for the match to start began to undulate and slide off the second story, crushing others as they fell.

Before the *döner* craze swept through Turkey, in the seventies, quickly establishing that sandwich as a standard, there was a similar craze for the peppery pizzalike meat dish called *lahmacun*. A better name for this food might have been Arab *pide*, though twenty years later I would see it described in one store as "Turkish pizza." (Whether or not the words *pide* and "pizza" share an etymology is a subject for another day.) But it was not Istanbul's buffets and kebab restaurants that won the country over to *lahmacun:* it was a new army of venders who conquered the city streets with their oval boxes. Now you didn't even have to go to the buffet on the corner to fill your stomach. A *lahmacun* seller would appear before you in a white apron, and when he opened his box, mouthwatering steam and the aroma of onions, ground meat, and red pepper would emerge. To scare us, my mother would say, "They don't make those *lahmacuns* from horse meat—they make them from cats and dogs." But when we saw the *lahmacun* men's boxes, each painted with a unique design, of brilliant flowers and branches and the names of cities like Antep and Adana, we would succumb to desire.

The best thing about Istanbul street food now is not that each purveyor is different from all the others, offering his own specialties; it is that these different street venders sell only the things that they themselves know and love. When I see the men who have taken a village dish—one that their mothers or their wives made for them at home—out into the streets of the big city, certain that everyone else will love it, too, I savor not just their chickpea pilaf or grilled meatballs or fried mussels or mussel dolmas or Albanian liver or fish sandwiches made with bonito from the Bosporus but the beauty of their decorated stands, their three-wheeled carts, their chairs. These venders are fewer today than they once were, but there was a time when they would roam the streets of Istanbul and, even as the city's millions swarmed around them, in their souls they were still living in the private, sacred world of their wives and mothers.

In the sixties, a childhood friend of mine who was crazy about street food would sometimes smile with his mouth full and shout out this slogan: "It's the dirt in food that gives it flavor!" In this way, he offered a defense against the sadness and guilt that went with eating far from your mother's kitchen. When I enjoy street food, what I feel most strongly is the sin of solitude. The mirrors that line the long narrow walls of the buffets and are meant to make them seem larger only enlarge my own sense of transgression. When I was fifteen or sixteen and stopped at these places on my way to watch a movie alone, I'd take a look at myself as I stood there eating my hamburger and drinking my *ayran* and see that I was not handsome, and I would feel alone and guilty and lost in the city's great crowds. ♦

(Translated, from the Turkish, by Maureen Freely.)

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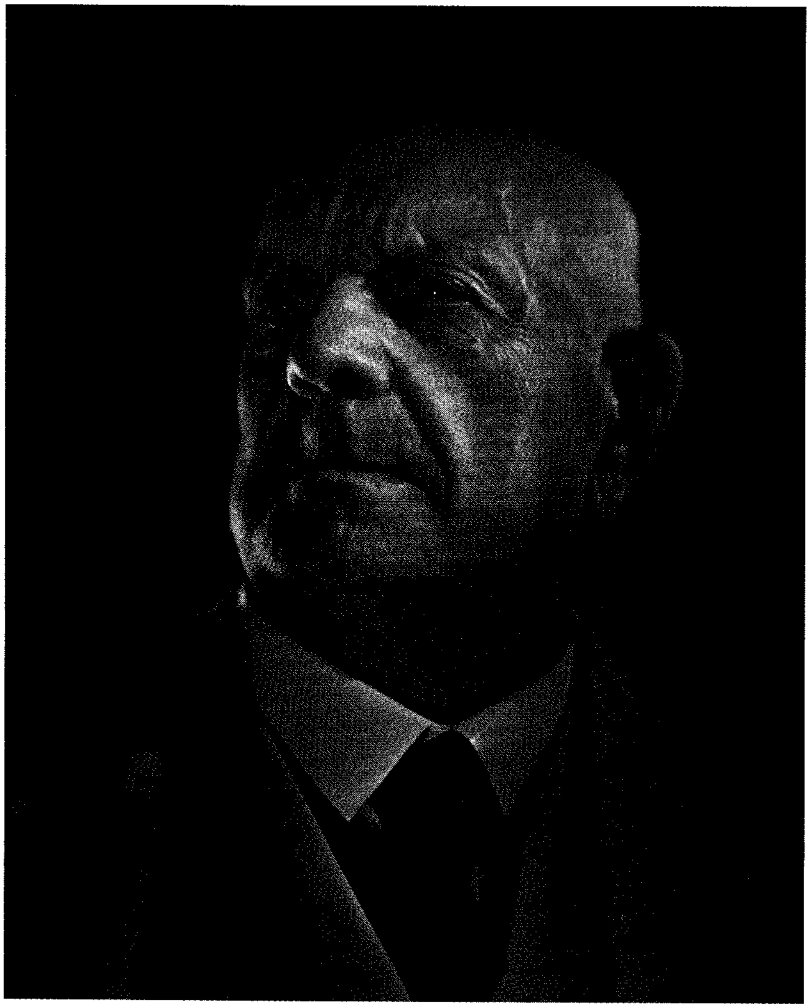
A CRITIC AT LARGE

APPARITION IN THE WOODS

Rescuing Sibelius from silence.

BY ALEX ROSS



Sibelius at his country home near Helsinki, in 1949. Photograph by Yousuf Karsh.

Composing music may be the loneliest of artistic pursuits. It is a laborious traversal of an imaginary landscape. Emerging from the process is an art work in code, which other musicians must be persuaded to unravel. Nameless terrors creep into the limbo between composition and performance, during which a score sits mutely on the desk. Hans Pfitzner dramatized that moment of panic and doubt in "Palestrina," his 1917 "musical legend" about the life of the Italian Renaissance master. The character of Palestrina speaks for colleagues across the centuries when he stops his work to cry, "What is the point of all this? *Ach*, what is it for?"

The Finnish composer Jean Sibelius may have asked that question once too often. The crisis point of his career arrived in the late nineteen-twenties and the early thirties, when he was being lionized as a new Beethoven in England and America, and dismissed as a purveyor of kitsch in the tastemaking European music centers, where atonality and other modern languages dominated the scene. The contrasts in the reception of his music, with its extremes of splendor and strangeness, matched the manic-depressive extremes of his personality—an alcoholic oscillation between grandiosity and self-loathing. Sometimes he believed that he was in direct communication with the Almighty ("For an instant God opens his door and *His* orchestra plays the Fifth Symphony," he wrote in a letter) and sometimes he felt worthless. In 1927, when he was sixty-one, he wrote in his diary, "Isolation and loneliness are driving me to despair. . . . In order to survive, I have to have alcohol. . . . Am abused, alone, and all my real friends are dead. My prestige here at present is rock-bottom. Impossible to work. If only there were a way out."

Sibelius, who was born in 1865 and died fifty years ago this September, spent the better part of his life at Ainola, a rustic house outside Helsinki. On his desk for many years lay the Eighth Symphony, which promised to be his summary masterpiece. He had been working on it since 1924 and had indicated several times that it was almost ready for performance. In 1933, a copyist transcribed twenty-three pages of the score, and at a later date Sibelius's publisher may have bound the manuscript in a set of seven volumes. There were reportedly parts for chorus, as in Beethoven's Ninth. But the Eighth never appeared. The composer finally gave in to the seduction of despair. "I suppose one henceforth takes me as—yes!—a 'fait accompli,' " he wrote in 1943. "Life is soon over. Others will come and surpass me in the eyes of the world. We are fated to die forgotten. I must start economizing. It can't go on like this."

Aino Sibelius, the composer's wife, for whom the house was named, recalled what happened next. "In the nineteen-forties there was a great *auto da fé* at Ainola," she said. "My husband collected a number of manuscripts in a laundry basket and burned them on the open fire in the dining room. Parts of the 'Karelia Suite' were destroyed—I later saw remains of the pages which had been torn out—and many other things. I did not have the strength to be present and left the room. I therefore do not know what he threw onto the fire. But after this my husband became calmer and gradually lighter in mood."

Ainola stands much as the composer left it. The atmosphere of the house is heavy and musty, as if Sibelius's spirit were still pent up inside. But you get a different feeling when you walk into the forest that abuts one side of the house. The treetops meet in an endless curving canopy. The ground is uncluttered: many paths fork among the trunks. Venturing a little farther into the wood, you lose sight of all human habitation. A profound stillness descends. The light begins to fail, the mists roll in. After a while, you may begin to wonder if you will ever find your way back. Many times in Sibelius's music, the exaltation of natural sublimity gives way to inchoate fear, which has less to do with the outer landscape than with the inner one: the forest of the mind.

Milan Kundera, in his 1993 essay collection "Testaments Betrayed," anatomizes the more peripheral European cultures, using his native Czechoslovakia as a specimen. "The small nations form 'another Europe,' " he writes. "An observer can be fascinated by the often astonishing intensity of their cultural life. This is the advantage of smallness: the wealth in cultural events is on a 'human scale.' " Kundera warns, however, that the familial feeling can turn tense and constricting: "Within that warm intimacy, each envies each, everyone watches everyone." If an artist ignores the rules, the rejection can be cruel. Even those who rise to fame may experience isolation at the summit—the burden of being a national hero.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, each of the "small nations" had a celebrity composer. Edvard Grieg in Norway, Antonín Dvořák in Czechoslovakia, and Carl Nielsen in Denmark, among others, served as ambassadors for their local cultures. In Russia and Britain, too, composers took on outsized roles, embodying ideas of national greatness, whether or not they desired the assignment. A little later in the twentieth century, certain composers who had come of age around 1900 became symbols, in a wider sense, of a rapidly fading pre-First World War world. They tended to be conservative in style, and they were haunted by feelings of obsolescence, to the point where they found it difficult to keep writing. The iconic British composer Edward Elgar, who died in 1934, failed to finish another large-scale work after his supremely elegiac Cello Concerto of 1918-19. Sergei Rachmaninoff produced only five major works from 1917 until his death, in 1943.

"I feel like a ghost wandering in a world grown alien," Rachmaninoff wrote in 1939. "I cannot cast out the old way of writing, and I cannot acquire the new. I have made intense effort to feel the musical manner of today, but it will not come to me. . . . I cannot cast out my musical gods in a moment and bend the knee to new ones." Sibelius felt the same pang of loss. "Not everyone can be an innovating genius," he wrote in his diary. "As a personality and as an apparition from the woods you will have your small, modest place."

And yet the so-called "regional" composers left an imposing body of work, which is integral to the century as a whole. Their music may lack the vanguard credentials of Schoenberg's or Stravinsky's, at least on the sonic surface, but Nielsen, in his 1925 book "Living Music," makes a good counter-argument: "The simplest is the hardest, the universal the most lasting, the straightest the strongest, like the pillars that support the dome." And, precisely because these composers communicated general feelings of mourning for a pre-technological past, or, more simply, a yearning for vanished youth, they remained acutely relevant for a broad public.

Mainstream audiences often lag behind the intellectual classes in appreciating the more adventurous composers, but sometimes they are quicker to perceive the value of music that the politicians of style fail to comprehend. In 1952, Nicolas Slonimsky put together a delightful book,"Lexicon of Musical Invective," an anthology of wrongheaded music criticism in which now canonical masterpieces are compared with feline caterwauling, barnyard noises, and so on. Slonimsky should also have written a "Lexicon of Musical Condescension," gathering high-minded essays in which now canonical masterpieces were dismissed as middlebrow, with a long section reserved for Sibelius.

Sibelius was not merely the most famous composer Finland ever produced but the country's chief celebrity in any field. He played a symbolic but active role in the drive toward Finnish independence, which was finally achieved in 1917. When Finns are asked to characterize their culture, they invariably mention, along with such national treasures as the lakeside sauna, Fiskars scissors, and Nokia cell phones, "our Sibelius." Mostly because of him, classical music has retained a central role in Finnish culture. The country's government invests enormous sums in orchestras, opera houses, new-music programs, and music schools. The annual Finnish expenditure on the arts is roughly two hundred times per capita what the United States government spends through the National Endowment for the Arts.

Finns are strangers to the European family. Descendants of an errant Mongolian tribe, they speak a language unrelated to the Indo-European linguistic group. For centuries, they were governed by the Swedes; then, in 1809, they became a semi-autonomous grand duchy of tsarist Russia. In the late nineteenth century, the Swedish influence remained strong, with a minority of Swedish-speakers forming the élite. Sibelius belonged to this group; he learned Finnish as a second language. Yet, like many of his generation, he avidly joined in the independence campaign, which became more urgent after Tsar Nicholas II introduced measures designed to suppress Finland's autonomy.

The national legends of Finland are contained in the "Kalevala," a poetic epic compiled in 1835 by a country doctor named Elias Lönnrot. Cantos 31 through 36 tell of the bloodthirsty young fighter Kullervo, who has his way with a young woman who turns out to be his sister. She commits suicide; he goes off to war. One day, finding himself again in the forest where the rape occurred, he asks his sword what kind of blood it wishes to taste. The sword demands the blood of a guilty man, whereupon Kullervo rams his body on the blade. In 1891 and 1892, Sibelius, who had just completed two final years of study in Berlin and Vienna, used this dismal tale as the basis for his first major work, "Kullervo," an eighty-minute symphonic drama for men's chorus, soloists, and orchestra.

The Finnish epic has a metre all its own: each line contains four main trochaic beats, but vowels are often stretched for dramatic effect. Instead of smoothing out the poetry into a foursquare rhythm, Sibelius bent his musical language in sympathetic response: in the third movement, for example, the orchestra maintains a pattern of five beats in a bar, while the chorus elongates its lines to phrases of fifteen, ten, eight, and twelve beats, respectively.

In 1892, "Kullervo" had a decisively successful première in Helsinki. For the remainder of the decade, Sibelius worked mainly in the tone-poem genre, consolidating his fame with such works as "En Saga," "The Swan of Tuonela," the "Karelia Suite," and the tuneful "Finlandia." Sibelius's mastery of the orchestra, already obvious in "Kullervo," became prodigious. "The Swan of Tuonela," which was conceived as the overture to an unfinished "Kalevala" opera, begins with the miragelike sound of A-minor string chords blended one into the next over a span of four octaves.

Sibelius finished his first two symphonies in 1899 and 1902. On the surface, these were typical orchestral dramas of the heroic soul, although Sibelius's habit of breaking down themes into murmuring textures sounded strange to many early listeners. Finns quickly appropriated the Second as an emblem of national liberation; the conductor Robert Kajanus heard in it "the most brokenhearted protest against all the injustice that threatens at the present time," together with "confident prospects for the future." In other words, the symphony was understood as a gesture of defiance in the face of the Tsar. Although Sibelius rejected this interpretation, images of the Finnish struggle may have played a role in his thinking. In the finale of the Second, a crawling, rising-and-falling figure in the violas and cellos evokes a recurring pattern in the second scene of Mussorgsky's "Boris Godunov"—the scene in which Pimen the monk records the villainies of Tsar Boris.

Sibelius's other "hit" scores of the period, the brilliantly moody Violin Concerto and the affectingly maudlin "Valse Triste," cemented his international reputation and therefore increased his stature at home. Around this time, though, alcohol became an issue. Sibelius, who often conducted his own works, would fortify himself with liquor before engagements, then disappear for days. A widely discussed painting by the Finnish artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela, "The Problem," depicted Sibelius drinking with friends, his eyes rolled back in his head. Although he was supported by a state pension, he ran up large debts. He was also beset by illnesses, some real and some imagined. Fissures were appearing in the façade that "Finland's hero" presented to the world.

In 1904, Sibelius tried to escape the embarrassments of his Helsinki life style by moving with his wife and three daughters to Ainola. There he set to work on his Third Symphony, which was itself a kind of musical escape. In contrast to the muscular rhetoric of "Kullervo" and the first two symphonies, the Third speaks in a self-consciously clear, pure language. At the same time, it is a sustained deconstruction of symphonic form. The last movement begins as a quicksilver Scherzo, but it gradually, almost imperceptibly, evolves into a marchlike Finale: the listener may have the feeling of the ground shifting underfoot.

Shortly after finishing this terse, elusive work, Sibelius got into a debate with Gustav Mahler on the nature of symphonic form. Mahler went to Helsinki in 1907 to conduct some concerts, and Sibelius presented his latest ideas about "severity of form" and the "profound logic" that should connect symphonic themes. "No!" Mahler replied. "The symphony must be like the world. It must be all-embracing."

Sibelius kept a close eye on the latest developments in European music. On visits to Germany, he became acquainted with Strauss's "Salome" and "Elektra" and Schoenberg's earliest atonal scores. He was variously fascinated, alarmed, and bored by these Austro-German experiments; more to his taste was the sensuous radicalism of Debussy, whose "Prelude to 'The Afternoon of a Faun,'" "Nocturnes," and "La Mer" revealed new possibilities in modal harmony and diaphanous orchestral color.

Sibelius, in his Fourth Symphony, completed in 1911, presented his listeners with music as tensely forbidding as anything from the European continent at the time. (Perhaps the most searching rendition of this symphony on disk is Osmo Vänskä's, with the Lahti Symphony, on the Bis label. Herbert von Karajan's recordings of the last four symphonies, on D.G., remain satisfying, and Leif Segerstam recently conducted a superb complete cycle for Ondine.) Sibe-

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lius wrote the Fourth in the wake of several risky operations on his throat, where a tumor was growing. His doctors instructed him to give up drinking, which he agreed to do, although he resumed in 1915. The temporary loss of alcohol—“my most faithful companion,” he later called it—may have contributed to the claustrophobic grimness of the music, which, at the same time, bespoke a liberated intellect. The first few bars of the symphony extrapolate a new dimension in musical time. The opening notes, scored darkly for cellos, basses, and bassoons, are C, D, F-sharp, E—an ambiguous whole-tone collection. It feels like the beginning of a major thematic statement, but it gets stuck on F-sharp and E, which oscillate and fade away. Meanwhile, the durations of the notes lengthen by degrees, from quarter notes to dotted quarters and then to half notes. It's as if a foreign body were exerting gravitational force on the music, slowing it down.

The narrative of the Fourth is circular rather than linear; it keeps revisiting the same insoluble conflicts. An effort at establishing F major as the key of the initially sunnier-sounding second movement founders on an immovable obstacle in the form of the note B-natural, after which there is a palpable shrug of defeat. The third movement dramatizes an attempt to build, note by note, a solemn six-bar theme of funerary character; the first attempt falters after three bars, the second after five, the third after four, the fourth after three. The fifth attempt proceeds with vigor but seems to go on too long, sprawling through seven bars without coming to a logical conclusion. Finally, with an audible grinding of the teeth, the full orchestra plays the theme in a richly harmonized guise. Then uncertainty steals back in.

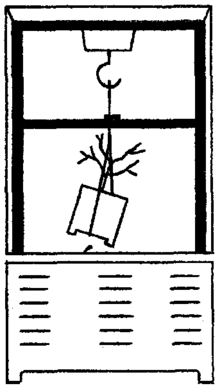
The finale thins out as it goes along, as if random pages of the orchestral parts had blown off the music stands. This is music facing extinction, a premonition of the silence that would envelop the composer two decades later. Erik Tawaststjerna, Sibelius's biographer, reveals that the middle section of the movement is based on sketches that Sibelius made for a vocal setting of Poe's “The Raven,” in a German translation. It is easy to see why a man of Sibelius's psychological makeup would have been drawn to its melancholia. The German translation follows the rhythm of the original, so Sibelius's music can be matched up with lines in Poe's poem. Softly crying flute and oboe lines in the epilogue fit the famous words “Quoth the Raven ‘Nevermore.’ ” The symphony closes with blank-faced chords that are given the dynamic marking mezzoforte—half-loud. The instruction is surprising. Most of the great Romantic symphonies end with fortissimo affirmations. Wagner operas and Strauss tone poems often close pianissimo, whether in blissful or tragic mood. Sibelius's Fourth ends not with a bang or a whimper but with a leaden thud.

“A symphony is not just a composition in the ordinary sense of the word,” Sibelius wrote in 1910. “It is more a confession of faith at different stages of one's life.” If the Fourth is a confession, its composer might have been on the verge of suicide. Yet, like so many Romantics before him, Sibelius took a perverse pleasure in surrendering to melancholy, and finding joy in darkness. “Joyful and sorrowful,” he wrote in his diary. In his next symphony, he set himself the goal of bringing to the surface the joy inherent in creation.

Joy is not the same thing as simplicity. The Fifth begins and ends in crystalline major-key tonality, but it is a staggeringly unconventional work. The schemata of sonata form dissolve before the listener's ears; in place of a methodical development of well-defined themes, there is a gradual, incremental evolution of material through trancelike repetitions. The musicologist James Hepokoski, in a monograph on the symphony, calls it “rotational form”; the principal ideas of the work come around again and again, though each time they are transformed in ways both small and large. The themes really assume their true shape only at the end of the rotation—what Hepokoski calls the “telos,” the epiphanic goal. Music becomes a search for meaning within an open-ended structure—an analogue to the spiritual life.

At the beginning of the Fifth, the horns present a softly glowing theme, the first notes of which spell out a symmetrical set of intervals: fourth, major second, fourth again. Fifty years later, John Coltrane used the same configuration in his jazz masterpiece "A Love Supreme." Sibelius's key is E-flat major, but the melody turns out to be a flighty thing, never quite touching the ground. A rhythmic trick adds to the sense of weightlessness. At first, it sounds like a standard 4/4 metre, but, after a syncopated sidestep, it turns out to be 12/8. A rotation process begins: the melodic material is broken into fragments and repeatedly reshaped. In the fourth iteration, an electrifying change occurs: the tempo accelerates by increments, until the music is suddenly hurtling forward. Sibelius achieved this effect by way of an exceptional feat of self-editing. After the première of the first version of the symphony, in 1915, he decided to rework it completely, and one thing he did was cut off the ending of the first movement, cut off the beginning of the second, and splice them together. The accelerating passage becomes a cinematic "dissolve" from one movement to another.

The second movement of the Fifth provides a spell of calm, although beneath the surface a significant new idea is coming to life—a swaying motif of rising-and-falling intervals, which the horns pick up in the finale and transform into the grandest of all Sibelian themes. The composer called it his "swan hymn"; he recorded it in his diary next to a description of sixteen swans flying in formation over Ainola. "One of my greatest experiences!" he wrote. "Lord God, that beauty! They circled over me for a long time. Disappeared into the solar haze like a gleaming, silver ribbon. . . . That this should have happened to me, who have so long been the outsider." The swans reappeared three days later: "The swans are always in my thoughts and give splendor to [my] life. [It's] strange to learn that nothing in the whole world affects me—nothing in art, literature, or music—in the same way as do these swans and cranes and wild geese. Their voices and being."



The swan hymn transcends the depiction of nature: it is like a spiritual force in animal form. When the horns introduce the theme, during a flurry of action in the strings, it's as if they had always been playing it, and the listener had only begun to hear it. A moment later, a reduced version of the theme is heard in the bass register of the orchestra at one-third the tempo, creating another hypnotic Sibelian effect of layered time. Then the winds launch into their own melody: a wistfully circling figure that bears an odd resemblance to Erik Satie's "Gymnopédies."

This is not "masculine" heroism on the order of Beethoven's "Eroica," which is also in the key of E-flat major. As Hepokoski suggests, Sibelius's later music implies a maternal rather than paternal logic—God-given themes gestating in symphonic form. Only by way of wrenching dissonances does the music break loose from its endlessly rocking motion and push toward a final cadence. The swan hymn, now carried by the trumpets, undergoes convulsive transformations, and is reborn as a fearsome new being. Its intervals split wide open, shatter, and re-form. The symphony ends with six far-flung chords, through which the main theme shoots like a pulse of energy. The swan becomes the sun.

Sibelius was at the height of his powers, yet he had precious little music left in him: the Sixth and Seventh Symphonies, the tone poem "Tapiola," incidental music for a production of Shakespeare's "The Tempest," a smattering of minor pieces, and the phantom Eighth. His pursuit of a final symphonic synthesis made the process of composition almost impossibly arduous. Suddenly dissatisfied with the fluid form that had evolved in the Fifth, he began to dream of a continuous blur of sound without any formal divisions—symphonies without movements, operas without words. Instead of writing the music of his imagination, he wanted to transcribe the very noise of nature. He thought that he could hear chords in the murmurs of the forests and the lapping of the lakes; he once baffled a group of Finnish students by giving a lecture on the overtone series of a meadow. Whatever he succeeded in putting on paper seemed paltry and inadequate. As the revisions

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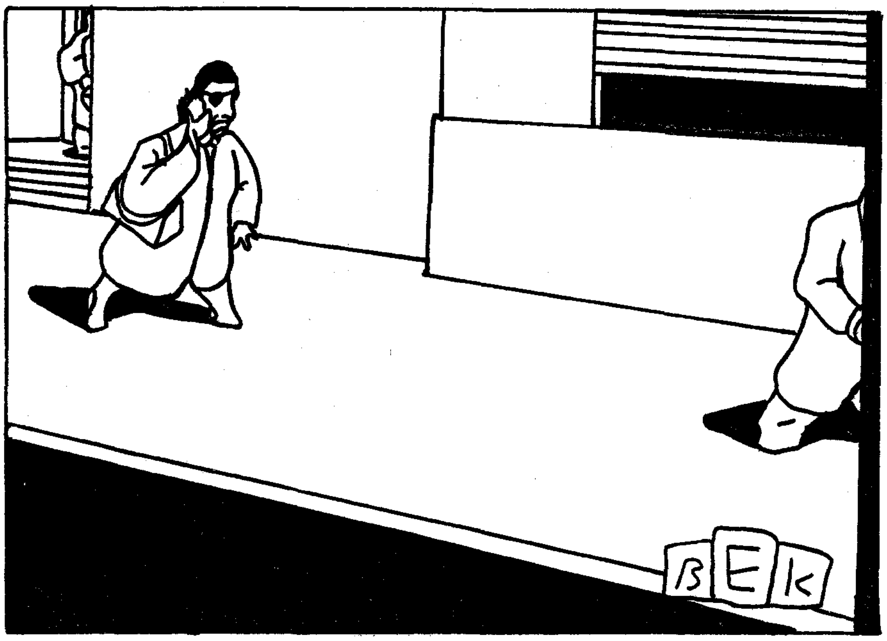


"My Zen garden has been a total nightmare."

of the Fifth show, he looked at his own creations with a merciless eye, slashing away at them as if they were the scribblings of an inept student.

Harbingers of silence proliferate in Sibelius's last works. As Hepokoski writes, his sonic narratives end not in a blaze of victory, as in the Fifth, but in "dissolution," "decay," "liquidation." The Sixth Symphony echoes the sober spirit of the Third, with antique modes underpinning the harmony; it's as if the composer were trying to flee into a mythic past. Yet brutal choirs of brass keep slicing into the gossamer string textures and through the neat ranks of dancing winds. The Seventh Symphony is anchored on a grand theme for solo trombone, which sounds three times against a mercurially changing background. In its final appearance, it generates such a heat of elation that it teeters on the edge of chaos. The "dissolution" takes the form of a metallic smear of dominant-seventh chords in chromatic sequence followed by a high, exposed line in the violins. And "Tapiola," a twenty-minute tone poem conjuring the Finnish forest, turned out to be Sibelius's most severe and concentrated musical statement. In a central section depicting a physical or mental storm, whole-tone harmony crumbles into near-total chromaticism—upward- and downward-slithering patterns of notes. Like a wanderer lost in the woods, the listener struggles to find a path through the thicket of sound. When the home chord of B minor is finally reasserted in the brass, it has a hollow ring, its middle note pushed deep into the bass. We are apparently back where we started, with no exit in sight.

Finally came the music for "The Tempest," commissioned by the Danish Royal Theatre, in 1925. Perhaps Sibelius felt some conscious or unconscious identification with the figure of Prospero, who, at the end of the play, decides to set aside his magic powers and resume a semblance of normal life:

> But this rough magic
> I here abjure. And when I have required
> Some heavenly music—which even now
>   I do—
> To work mine end upon their senses that
> This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,
> Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
> And deeper than did ever plummet sound
> I'll drown my book.

Sibelius wrote no music for this tremendous speech, but its rhetoric infuses the cue for "solemn music" that follows, with dissonances sounding at earsplitting volume. Then the chaos melts away into a clean open fifth, which sounds alien in context. All this evokes Prospero dimming the sun, setting sea and sky at war, waking the dead. A quiet hymn for strings follows, in which the chromaticism of the tempest is woven back into classical harmony. It is "heavenly music," but also sweet, ordinary music, dispelling the rage and pain that fuel Prospero's art.

Did Sibelius, like Prospero, think about abjuring his magic and drowning his book? If so, he gave no sign of it in the late nineteen-twenties and the early thirties. The Eighth Symphony was under way, and the composer seemed happy with it. He is known to have worked on the piece in the spring of 1931, while staying alone in Berlin. Writing home to Aino, he said that the symphony was "making great strides," although he was puzzled by the form it was taking. "It's strange, this work's conception," he told his wife. That is all we know about it.

Fame can confuse any artist, and it had an especially disorienting effect on Sibelius. Why his symphonies struck such a chord with Jazz Age audiences is difficult to explain. Perhaps they achieved mass popularity precisely because they were foreign to the neon light and traffic noise of contemporary urban life. In any case, no composer of the time caused such mass excitement, especially in America. Celebrity conductors vied for signs of favor from Ainola. New York Philharmonic listeners voted Sibelius their favorite living symphonist. His name even cropped up as a plot point in Hollywood movies. In Otto Preminger's chic 1944 thriller "Laura," a detective, played by Dana Andrews, interrogates a shady Southern gentleman, portrayed by Vincent Price:

> DANA ANDREWS: You know a lot about music?
>
> VINCENT PRICE: I don't know a lot about anything, but I know a little about practically everything.
>
> DANA ANDREWS: Yeah? Then why did you say they played Brahms's First and Beethoven's Ninth at the concert Friday night? They changed the program at the last minute and played nothing but Sibelius.

"Nothing but Sibelius" comes close to summing up American orchestral programming of the period. Serge Koussevitzky, the conductor of the Boston Symphony, presented a cycle of Sibelius symphonies in the 1932-33 season, and hoped to cap the series with the world première of the Eighth.

Olin Downes, who from 1924 to 1955 served as music critic of the *Times,* was crucial to Sibelius's American reputation. The son of Louise Corson Downes, a crusading feminist and Prohibitionist, Downes believed that classical music should appeal not just to élites but to common people, and in the *Times* he condemned the obscurantism of modern music—in particular, the artificiality, capriciousness, and snobbery that he perceived in the music of Stravinsky. Sibelius was different; he was "the last of the heroes," "a new prophet."

Downes travelled to Finland in 1927 to meet Sibelius. The composer had fallen into one of his periodic bouts of depression. Meeting Downes temporarily lifted his spirits, although, in the long term, Downes's devotion may have had a deleterious effect. Glenda Dawn Goss, in a book-length study of this singular composer-critic relationship, suggests that Sibelius was in some way crushed by the attention that Downes heaped on him.

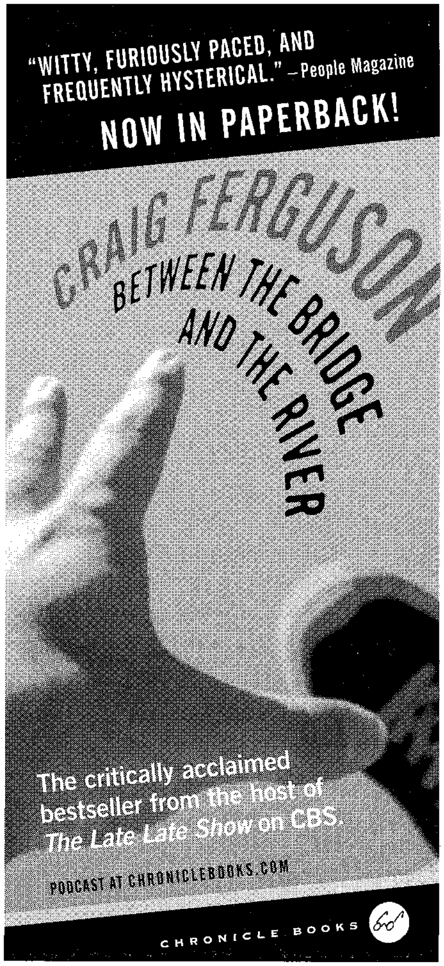
In the early thirties, just as Koussevitzky was expecting to conduct the première of the Eighth Symphony in Boston, Downes pestered Sibelius for the completed score. In 1937, Downes wrote a follow-up letter in which he passed along the sentiments of none other than Louise Corson Downes: "My mother and I often speak of you and she asked me again about the Eighth Symphony. . . . 'Tell Mr. Sibelius that I am not concerned or anxious so much about his Eighth Symphony, which I know he will complete in his own good time, as about his *Ninth.* He must crown his series of works in this form with a ninth symphony which will represent the summit and the synthesis of his whole achievement and leave us a work which will be worthy of one of the elected few who are the true artistic descendants and inheritors of Beethoven.' "

As if pressure from music critics' mothers were not enough, Sibelius was also brooding over his music's reception in Europe. Paris had no time for him. Berlin, before Hitler came to power, viewed him with condescension bordering on contempt. In those cities, expansive symphonies and evocative tone poems had little intellectual market value. The critic Heinrich Strobel referred to Sibelius's Violin Concerto as "boring Nordic dreariness."

In America, Downes's pugilistic praise of Sibelius aroused resentment among Stravinsky's many followers and admirers. In 1940, Virgil Thomson became the music critic of the New York *Herald Tribune,* and in his début review he tore lustily into Sibelius, calling the Second Symphony "vulgar, self-indulgent, and provincial beyond all description." Equally venomous attacks emanated from the Schoenberg camp. The émigré theorist Theodor W. Adorno prepared a dire analysis of the Sibelius phenomenon for a sociological think tank called the Princeton Radio Research Project: "The work of Sibelius is not only incredibly overrated, but it fundamentally lacks any good qualities. . . . If Sibelius's music is good music, then all the categories by which musical standards can be measured—standards which reach from a master like Bach to most advanced composers like Schoenberg—must be completely abolished." Adorno sent his essay to Thomson, who, while agreeing with its sentiments, sagely advised that "the tone is more apt to create antagonism toward yourself than toward Sibelius."

Sibelius's confidence was by that time already gone. You can see it slipping away in his correspondence with Koussevitzky, which is preserved at the Library of Congress. The conductor sends letters and telegrams almost every month, pleading for the Eighth. Sibelius replies in an elegant, slanting hand on parchment-like paper, tantalizingly mentioning a symphony that is almost, but not quite, finished.

In January, 1930, Sibelius reports, "My new work is not nearly ready and I cannot say when it will be ready." In August, 1930, he is more sure: "It looks as though I can send you a new work this season." But he is worried about American copyrights, which do not protect his music. Koussevitzky reassures him that the symphony will be safe from piracy. In the end, it does not appear. Then, in August, 1931, in the wake of his productive stay in Berlin, Sibelius writes, "If you wish to perform my new Symphonia in the spring, it will, I believe, be ready." In December, the information is leaked to the Boston *Evening Transcript:* "Symphony Hall has re-



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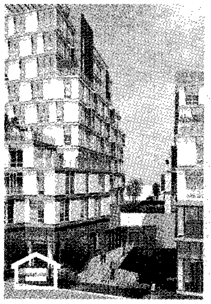
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ceived an important letter from Sibelius, the composer, about his new Symphony, the Eighth. It is completed, and the score will soon be on the way to Boston." Another apologetic telegram from Finland arrives two weeks later. Sibelius probably heard of the *Transcript* article and panicked.

The following June, the Eighth is back on its feet: "It would be good if you could conduct my new symphony at the end of October." Then comes a fresh panic. "Unfortunately I have named October for my new symphony," he writes just a week later. "This is not certain, I am very disturbed about it. Please do not announce the performance." Eventually, it is promised for December, 1932. Koussevitzky sends a "restless" telegram on New Year's Eve, as if he had been checking the mailbox every day. Two weeks later, he receives yet another terse telegram, yet another postponement. There are a few more tentative mentions of the Eighth in subsequent correspondence, then nothing.

In the late thirties, Sibelius again hoped to set the Eighth free from its forest prison. By that time, he knew better than to say anything to the garrulous Koussevitzky. Then, in 1939, Hitler invaded Poland, and Finland became part of a chess game between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Early in the war, Finland was applauded in the West for its hardy stand against the Soviets, and Sibelius was more popular than ever. In 1941, though, Finland aligned itself with the Germans, partly because Fascist elements had infiltrated the government and the Army, and partly because the Nazis would have taken over the country anyway. Sibelius went from being a symbol of freedom to serving as an apparent Nazi stooge. As a Nordic, "Aryan" composer, he had enjoyed glowing notices in Nazi Germany. Now he became almost an official German artist, receiving as many performances as Richard Strauss. He allegedly said, in a message to Nazi troops, "I wish with all my heart that you may enjoy a speedy victory."

Sibelius was privately tormented by the promulgation of Nazi-style race laws in Finland. In 1943, he wrote in his diary, "How can you, Jean Sibelius, possibly take these 'Aryan paragraphs' seriously? . . . You are a cultural aristocrat and *can* make a stand against stupid prejudice." But he made no stand. As the culture god of the Finnish state, he had long since ceased to see a difference between music and history, and now with the world in flames his music seemed destined for ruin. At the same time, obscure private agonies consumed him. The diary again: "*The tragedy begins.* My burdensome thoughts paralyze me. The cause? Alone, alone. I never allow the great distress to pass my lips. Aino must be spared." The final page of the diary, in 1944, contains a shopping list for champagne, cognac, and gin.

Sibelius lived to the age of ninety-one, making wry jokes about his inability to die. "All the doctors who wanted to forbid me to smoke and to drink are dead," he once said. In a more serious mood, he observed, "It is very painful to be eighty. The public love artists who fall by the wayside in this life. A true artist must be down and out or die of hunger. In youth he should at least die of consumption." One September morning in 1957, he went for his usual walk in the fields and forest around Ainola, scanning the skies for cranes flying south for the winter. They were part of his ritual of autumn; when he was writing the Fifth Symphony, he had noted in his diary, "Every day I have seen the cranes. Flying south in full cry with their music. Have been yet again their most assiduous pupil. Their cries echo throughout my being." When, on the third-to-last day of his life, the cranes duly appeared, he told his wife, "Here they come, the birds of my youth!" One of them broke from the flock, circled the house, cried out, and flew away.

There is a curiously moving photograph of Igor Stravinsky kneeling at Sibelius's grave, a horizontal metal slab on the grounds at Ainola. The visit took place four years after Sibelius's death. The master of modern music had practical reasons for making the pilgrimage: the Finnish government had promised him the Wihuri Sibelius Prize, worth twenty-five thousand dollars. But the gesture had a certain gallantry. In the past, Stravinsky had belittled Sibelius: on the occasion of the old man's death, he had slammed down the phone when a reporter called for a comment. In his last years, though, Stravinsky warmed to a few Sibelius scores, and made an arrangement for octet of the Canzonetta for strings.

The notion that there might be something "modern" about Sibelius was risible to self-styled progressives of the immediate postwar era. The Schoenbergian pedagogue René Leibowitz summed up the feelings of many new-music connoisseurs when, in 1955, he published a pamphlet titled "Sibelius: The Worst Composer in the World." Surveys of twentieth-century music labelled the composer a marginal figure in the central drama of the march toward atonality and other intellectual landmarks. Yet performances of Sibelius's music continued unabated; conductors and audiences had it right all along.

In the last decades of the century, the politics of style changed in Sibelius's favor. He began to be understood in terms of what Milan Kundera called, in another meditation on the culture of small nations, "antimodern modernism"—a personal style that stands outside the status quo of perpetual progress. Suddenly, composers and scholars were paying heed to Sibelius's effects of thematic deliquescence, his ever-evolving forms, his unearthly timbres. New-music luminaries, from the hyper-complex Brian Ferneyhough to the neo-Romantic John Adams, cited him as a model. Among them was a group of Finns—Magnus Lindberg, Kaija Saariaho, and Esa-Pekka Salonen—who found new respect for the national hero after having rejected him in their punkish youth. Lindberg made his name with a gripping piece called "Kraft" (1983-85), whose orchestra is augmented by scrap-metal percussion and a conductor blowing a whistle. At any given point, it sounds nothing like Sibelius—Lindberg cites the influence of German noise-rock bands—but the accumulation of roiling sonic masses from microscopic material feels like a computer-age reprise of "Tapiola."

In 1984, the great American avant-garde composer Morton Feldman gave a lecture at the relentlessly up-to-date Summer Courses for New Music, in Darmstadt, Germany. "The people who you think are radicals might really be conservatives," Feldman said on that occasion. "The people who you think are conservative might really be radical." And he began to hum the Sibelius Fifth. ♦

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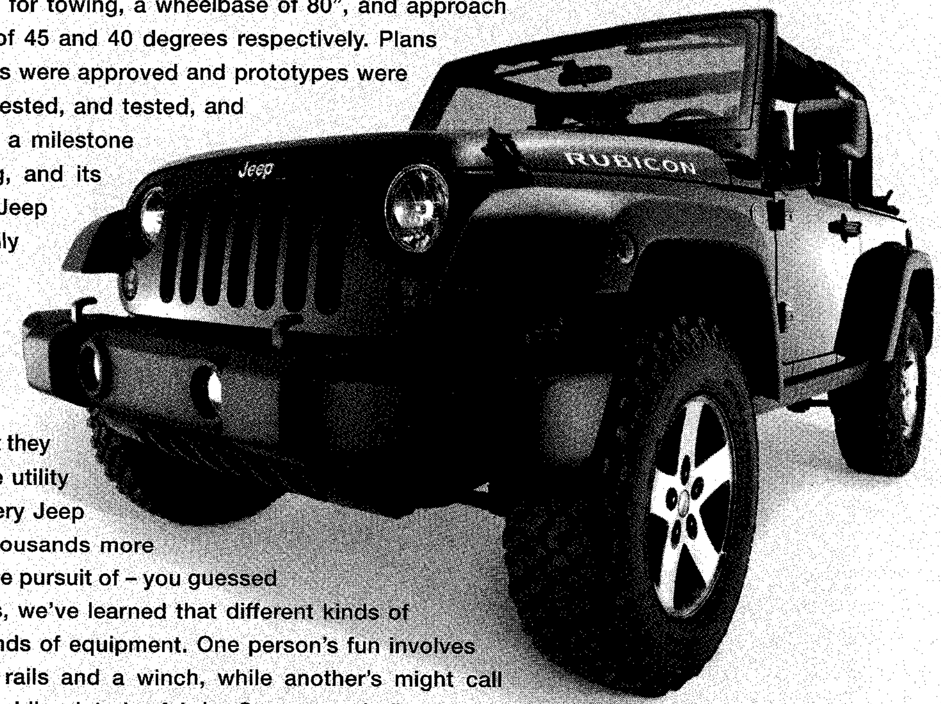

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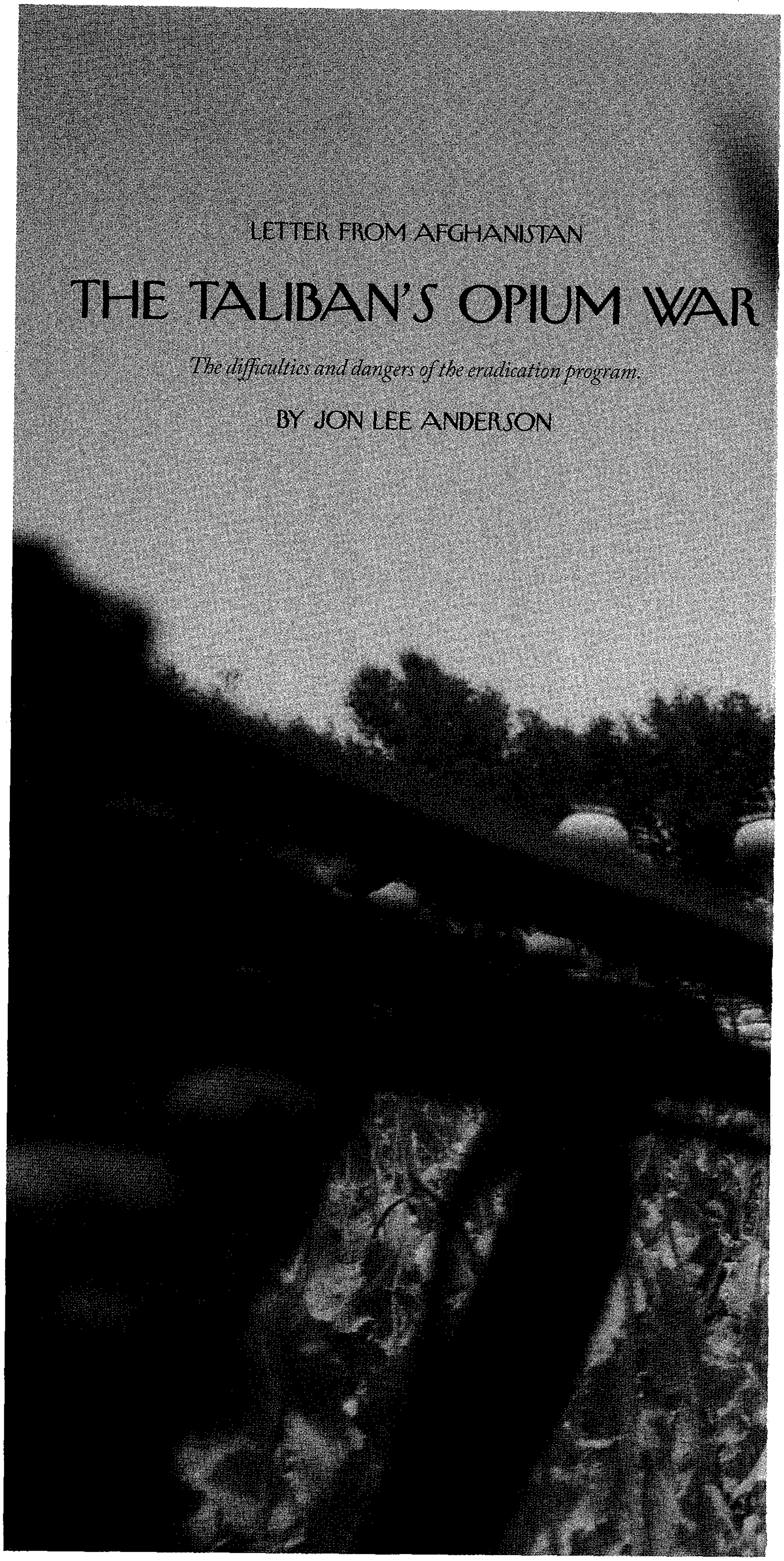


While destroying a field of opium poppies in Uruzgan Province, members of the Afgh

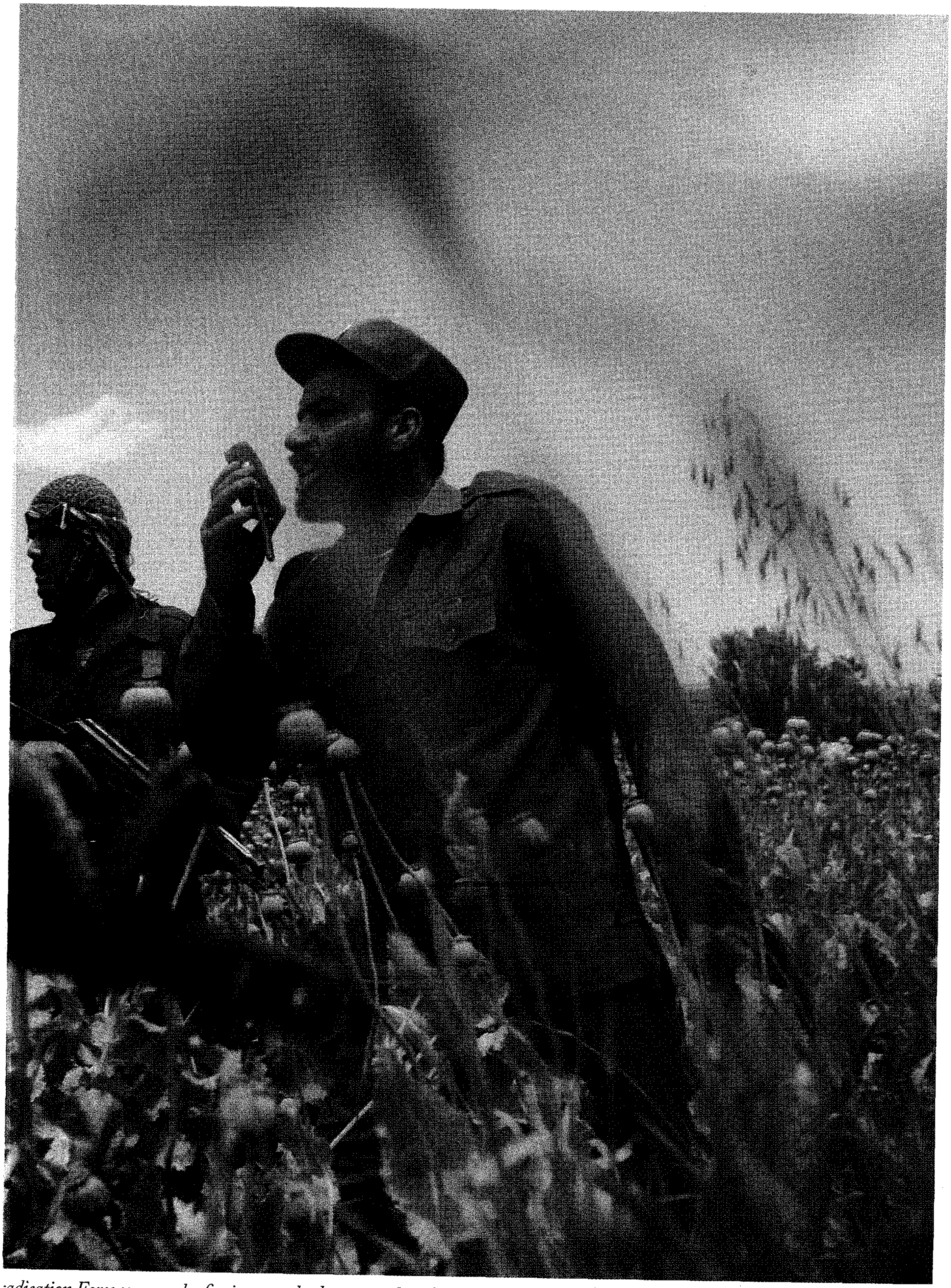
ATLAS PRESS

In the main square in Tirin Kot, the capital of Uruzgan Province, in central Afghanistan, a large billboard shows a human skeleton being hanged. The rope is not a normal gallows rope but the stem of an opium poppy. Aside from this jarring image, Tirin Kot is a bucolic-seeming place, a market town of flat-topped adobe houses and little shops on a low bluff on the eastern shore of the Tirinrud River, in a long valley bounded by open desert and jagged, treeless mountains. About ten thousand people live in the town. The men are bearded and wear traditional robes and tunics and cover their heads with turbans or sequinned skullcaps. There are virtually no women in sight, and when they do appear they wear all-concealing burkas. A few paved streets join at a traffic circle in the center of town, but within a few blocks they peter out to dirt tracks.

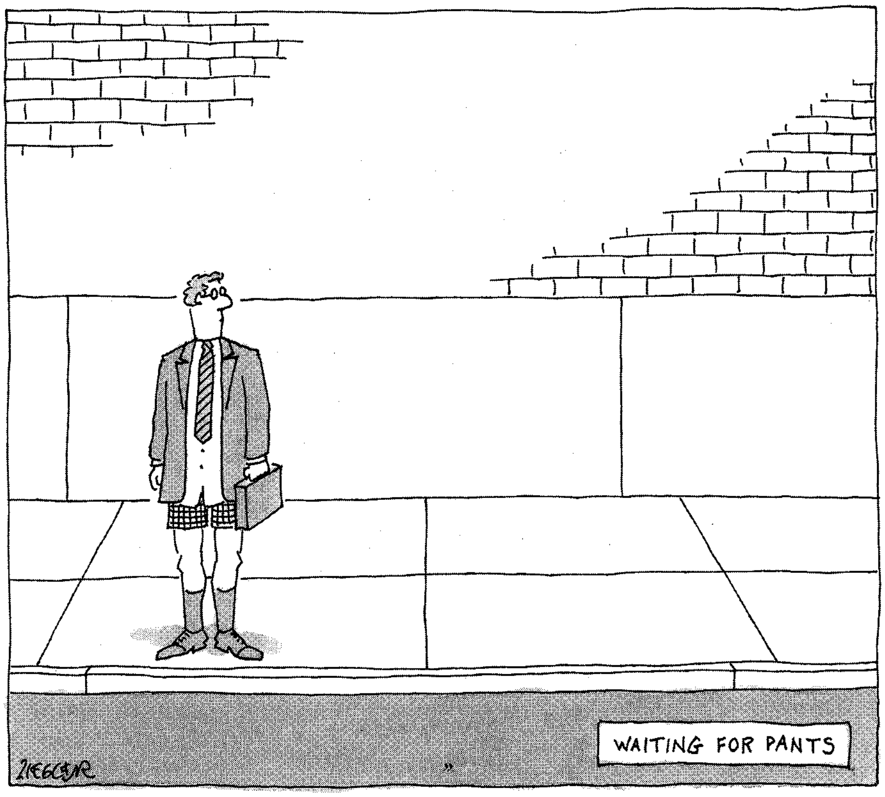
Almost everything around Tirin Kot is some shade of brown. The river is a khaki-colored wash of silt and snowmelt that flows out of the mountain range to the north, past mud-walled family compounds. On either side of the river, however, running down the valley, there is a narrow strip of wheat fields and poppy fields, and for several weeks in the spring the poppies bloom: lovely, open-petalled white, pink, red, and magenta blossoms, the darker colors indicating the ones with the most opium.

One afternoon this spring, at the height of the harvest, I drove through the area with Douglas Wankel, a former Drug Enforcement Administration official who was hired by the United States government in 2003 to organize its counter-narcotics effort here. Wankel, who is sixty-one and has piercing blue eyes, was stationed in Kabul as a young D.E.A. official in 1978 and 1979, during the bloody unrest that led up to the Soviet invasion. "I left on a flight to New Delhi a couple of hours before the Soviets rolled in," he said. "People thought it was because I knew it was coming. I didn't; I just happened to be leaving on a trip. But the Soviets branded me a C.I.A. agent, and so I couldn't come back—until now, that is."

Working first with the D.E.A. and then with the State Department, Wankel helped create the Afghan Eradication Force, with troops of the Afghan National Police drawn from the Ministry of



adication Force came under fire in an ambush apparently orchestrated by the Taliban. Photographs by Aaron Huey.



the Interior. Last year, an estimated four hundred thousand acres of opium poppies were planted in Afghanistan, a fifty-nine-per-cent increase over the previous year. Afghanistan now supplies more than ninety-two per cent of the world's opium, the raw ingredient of heroin. More than half the country's annual G.D.P., some $3.1 billion, is believed to come from the drug trade, and narcotics officials believe that part of the money is funding the Taliban insurgency.

Wankel was in Uruzgan to oversee a poppy-eradication campaign—the first major effort to disrupt the harvest in the province. He had brought with him a two-hundred-and-fifty-man A.E.F. contingent, including forty-odd contractors supplied by DynCorp, a Virginia-based private military company, which has a number of large U.S. government contracts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other parts of the world. In Colombia, DynCorp helps implement the multibillion-dollar Plan Colombia, to eradicate coca. The A.E.F.'s armed convoy had taken three days to drive from Kabul, and had set up a base on a plateau above a deep wadi. With open land all around, it was a good spot to ward off attacks.

Much of Uruzgan is classified by the United Nations as "Extreme Risk / Hostile Environment." The Taliban effectively controls four-fifths of the province, which, like the movement, is primarily Pashtun. Mullah Omar, the fugitive Taliban leader, was born and raised here, as were three other founders of the movement. The Taliban's seizure of Tirin Kot, in the mid-nineties, was a key stepping stone in their march to Kabul, and their loss of the town in 2001 was a decisive moment in their fall. The Taliban have made a concerted comeback in the past two years; they are the de-facto authority in much of the Pashtun south and east, and have recently spread their violence to parts of the north as well. The debilitating and corrupting effects of the opium trade on the government of President Hamid Karzai is a significant factor in the Taliban's revival.

The Taliban instituted a strict Islamist policy against the opium trade during the final years of their regime, and by the time of their overthrow they had virtually eliminated it. But now, Lieutenant General Mohammad Daud-Daud, Afghanistan's deputy minister of the interior for counter-narcotics, told me, "there has been a coalition between the Taliban and the opium smugglers. This year, they have set up a commission to tax the harvest." In return, he said, the Taliban had offered opium farmers protection from the government's eradication efforts. The switch in strategy has an obvious logic: it provides opium money for the Taliban to sustain itself and helps it to win over the farming communities.

Wankel had flown in from Kabul five days earlier to meet with the governor of Uruzgan, Abdul Hakim Munib, about the eradication operation, only to discover that Munib had left for Kabul the day before. Wankel was told that a sister of the governor had died or fallen ill—there were several versions—but nobody believed this was the real reason for his absence. Munib, a former Taliban deputy minister, was suspected of retaining ties to the movement. And, Wankel noted, there were poppy fields within sight of Munib's palace.

"We're not able to destroy all the poppy—that's not the point. What we're trying to do is lend an element of threat and risk to the farmers' calculations, so they won't plant next year," Wankel said later. "It's like robbing a bank. If people see there's more to be had by robbing a bank than by working in one, they're going to rob it, until they learn there's a price to pay."

We came to a wide bend in the river, a stretch of good, flat growing land with broad poppy fields. The fields were neat and well tended, and the swollen bulbs beneath the blossoms on their long green stalks were dripping with dark-brown opium. A heady, acrid odor like stale urine hung in the air. Small groups of men and boys were in the fields, scoring the bulbs to bleed the opium. They stopped and stared at us when we drove past, and then continued their work.

Before Doug Wankel could do anything in Uruzgan, he had to talk to the Dutch. In a bewilderingly complicated arrangement, NATO member states have been put in charge of military operations in different Afghan provinces—the British in Helmand, for instance, and the Canadians in Kandahar. Since August, 2006, the Dutch have been in Uruzgan. A seventeen-hundred-member Dutch force occupies a sprawling walled base southwest of Tirin Kot. Smaller bases within the walls house contingents of Australians, U.S. Special Forces, and the Afghan Army. Military aircraft land at and take off from an airstrip there at all hours. There are small firebases elsewhere in the province, but troops at the main base rarely venture far from Tirin Kot.

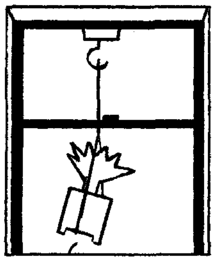
Suicide bombings and I.E.D. attacks, major features of the Iraq insurgency, were rare in Afghanistan until 2005, but they have become common, and not just in Uruzgan. On June 17th, a suicide bomber blew up a bus in Kabul, killing dozens of people. Although a threatened Tet-style spring offensive by the Taliban never quite materialized, the level of violence has risen significantly. Some five thousand people were killed in the war last year, including a hundred and ninety-one foreign troops and at least a thousand civilians. By contrast, half that number of people were killed in 2005. As the war gets worse, incidents involving the killing of Afghan civilians by American troops, unintentional or not, have increased, causing widespread discontent. In May, the upper house of the Afghan parliament called for an end to offensive military operations by foreign troops and for dialogue with the Taliban. Karzai has complained publicly about the civilian deaths, but he is dependent on the foreign forces to prop him up. (Thirty-five thousand troops from thirty-seven nations are now in Afghanistan under the NATO umbrella; seventeen thousand are American. Another eight thousand American troops operate under U.S. military command.) Karzai seems isolated and weak, and his authority barely extends beyond the capital.

The effects of the war and the drug boom are evident in Kabul. There are more security barriers and anti-suicide-blast walls in the city, and United Nations personnel and relief workers must adhere to constantly updated safety guidelines and curfews. The rules are even stricter for American diplomats and officials, who live and work within their own new Embassy compound. Meanwhile, in nearby Sherpur, a downtown neighborhood, dozens of gaudy "poppy palaces" have gone up—mansions owned by former warlords and by senior officials in Karzai's government, built on public land that had housed war-displaced families until they were forcibly removed by police.

The official corruption and judicial impunity that have taken root under Karzai are seen as his greatest failings, and feature heavily in Taliban propaganda. Two years ago, his government announced a plan for fighting the opium trade, based on "eight pillars," including building the justice system, eradicating the poppy crop, and funding alternative development programs that would provide seeds for other crops and credits for fertilizer. The plan is backed by a commitment of billions of dollars from the U.S., but so far there has been little to show for it.

A Western official in Kabul told me, "The narcotics issue is an example of the problems this government faces—corruption, tribal politics, and lack of central institutions. Here it's not *re*construction—you're starting from zero on a lot of issues. We're trying to impose all of it at once, and it's hugely frustrating." The official went on, "Right now you've got to work with what you've got, and here you've got people who've figured out how to survive through thirty pretty horrific years. There's a lot of dealmaking. We have to be realistic about whom we're dealing with. And we have to show we're going to be dogged on this."

In Uruzgan, the Dutch have advocated a policy of nonconfrontation and the pursuit of development projects. (The Dutch commander, Hans van Griensven, was quoted in the *Times* in April as telling his officers, "We're not here to fight the Taliban. We're here to make the Taliban irrelevant.") A European official told me that the Dutch had doubts about Wankel's mission; they feared that it might be counterproductive, because it was only about destroying poppies and did not include any of the other seven pillars of the national plan. "There was concern that it might crosscut other activities focussed on security and development," he said.



Wankel was frustrated by the wariness of the Dutch. "Most or all Europeans are opposed to eradication—they're into winning hearts and minds," he said. "But it's our view that it isn't going to work. There has to be a measured, balanced use of force along with hearts and minds." He conceded, however, that the Uruzgan operation fell squarely on the use-of-force side of the scale. Later, he told me, aid, seed, and fertilizer would be offered to the farmers around Tirin Kot, but not yet. Other Americans were frankly contemptuous of the Dutch policy, which they regarded as softheaded.

The Western official told me, "We don't have a lot of time here. If we don't get a handle on this soon, we'll have a situation where you can't get rid of it, like we had in Colombia for a while, where the narcos owned part of the government and controlled significant parts of the economy. And we have a lot of evidence of direct links with the Taliban. These problems, and organized crime, too, are being embedded here while they're talking about 'alternative development.'"

Soona Niloofar, a member of parliament from Uruzgan, found the debate over development versus forceful eradication somewhat abstract; she didn't think much had been accomplished on either front. "Before the Dutch arrived, I told them, 'You must do reconstruction and help the farmers.' And the Ministry of Agriculture also spoke about helping them with alternative livelihoods. But nothing happened," she said. "They have done little reconstruction. There is a big gap between them and the people." The Dutch presence was felt only around Tirin Kot, she said, and, as far as she knew, the only significant things they had done were to repair a damaged bridge and set up a women's sewing coöperative. (A spokesman for the Dutch government said that there had been other projects, including one called Cleaning Up Tirin Kot, which involved painting storefronts and helping with garbage disposal.) At the same time, security had deteriorated. "The Dutch policy is a very weak one, and it makes the enemy stronger," she said.

Niloofar, who is twenty-seven, is a striking woman with a strong face and high cheekbones, and, on the day I met her, at the Parliament, she wore, instead of a burka, a brilliant turquoise shalwar kameez and head scarf—all the more noticeable in the assemblage of drably suited and robed male M.P.s. The Taliban have targeted women in public life, including teachers at girls' schools, and a number have been killed. Niloofar said that she could no longer safely travel to her home in Uruzgan or stay there overnight.

"People are getting very angry with

Karzai," Niloofar said. "At the beginning of the year, he promised to sack the governors where opium is grown." She smiled sarcastically. "Nothing has been done."

"There is a fairly strong consensus view here that eradication alone, in the absence of the other seven lines, will not curb poppy cultivation or opium production," Chris Alexander, a Canadian who is one of the top-ranking United Nations officials in Afghanistan, said. "But in Helmand and Uruzgan all of these steps depend on improved security, which must remain the overriding priority. The Taliban have partnered in intimate ways with the drug networks over the past two years. Their alliance deserves to be exposed for the opportunism and criminality it represents." He added, "This Taliban is no fresh-faced Islamist movement. It is a violent, drug-fuelled rabble with a narrow and highly unappealing ideological base. Their defeat—or at least reduced influence—can open the door to a much more effective counter-narcotics policy."

After a meeting with the Dutch, Wankel returned to the A.E.F.'s camp, looking tired and exasperated. He had a map approved by the Dutch, showing a tight quadrant of land within which his team was to confine its work. It was miles away from the Dutch base. "They're as nervous as whores in a church," Wankel said.

The eradication team set off early the next morning for their first day's work. There were nineteen Americans and a hundred Afghans in a convoy made up of twenty-four all-terrain vehicles—similar to small dune buggies—eighteen Ranger pickup trucks carrying Afghan policemen, and four of DynCorp's white Ford F250 pickups. I rode in a truck driven by David Lockyear, an amiable six-foot-seven-inch Tennessean in his thirties, known as Doc Dave. Lockyear, who had a goatee and was covered with tattoos, was a paramedic from Nashville who joined the Marine Corps after September 11th. ("I was just pissed off, like a lot of people, and wanted to do something," he said.) He fought in the first siege of Falluja, and in 2007 he went to work for DynCorp. He smoked a Marlboro and held a cup of coffee in one hand as he drove.

A great dust cloud formed as the A.T.V.s hyperkinetically whizzed past us and the trucks kicked up plumes of swirling yellow powder. Picking up speed, Lockyear exclaimed, "This is redneck heaven. You get to run around the desert on A.T.V.s and pickups, shoot guns, and get paid for it. Man, it's the perfect job!"

When we reached the target area, men on A.T.V.s cut through the fields, dragging metal bars on chains, which knocked down the poppies. Other members of the team whacked at the poppies with shovel handles. Around the edges of the fields and on small hills above them, armed Afghan Interior Ministry policemen stood guard. Wankel had attended a *shura*, or council of local elders, a few days before, to explain the mission, and a small group of local Pashtun policemen were on hand, but the A.E.F. team consisted mostly of men from other areas of the country. Major Khalil, the deputy commander, was an ethnic Tajik, and didn't trust the Pashtuns. (Like many Afghans, Khalil uses only one name.) He came from the same village in the northern province of Panjshir as the mujahideen hero Ahmed Shah Massoud, who was assassinated by Al Qaeda two days before the September 11th attacks. Khalil described the area where we were as "the heart of enemy territory."

Doug Wankel walked up to an angry-looking farmer who was watching his field being destroyed and asked him, through an interpreter named Nazeem, how much he got for his opium. Twenty-one thousand Pakistani rupees for a four-kilo package, the farmer said, and he harvested three to four kilos per jirib (a local land measurement equivalent to about half an acre). He added, "I get only a thousand rupees per jirib of wheat, so I'm obliged to grow poppies." That comes to about thirty-three dollars from an acre of wheat, and between five hundred and seven hundred dollars from an acre of poppies. In Uruzgan, the opium was sold to middlemen who then smuggled it out of Afghanistan to Pakistan or Iran.

"How long have you been growing poppies?" Wankel asked him.

The farmer looked surprised. "When I was born, I saw the poppies," he said.

When we were ready to move on, the farmer said, as if to be polite, "Thank you—but I can't really thank you, because you haven't destroyed just my poppies but my wheat, too." He pointed to where A.T.V.s had driven through a wheat patch. Wankel apologized, then commented that it was only one small section. "But you have also damaged my watermelons," the farmer insisted, pointing to another part of the field. "Now I will have nothing left."

Wankel turned away. As we walked on, the farmer called out, "Are you destroying all the poppies or just my field?"

About a dozen men and boys gathered on a low dirt wall next to another field and watched the proceedings impassively. A young girl wiped away tears with her scarf and yelled angrily at a policeman. Nearby, several Americans were resting in the shade of some mulberry trees, talking to each other. One of the local men, who wore a black turban, said to them, "We're poor—we're not with the Taliban or anything. You've made a big mistake. Now we'll grow more against you." He added, "I have to feed my children."

Nazeem, the translator, spoke to the men in Pashto, and recited passages from the Koran proscribing opium. One of the men retorted, "The Koran also says to fight against *kafirs*"—that is, infidels. His companions stirred and nodded.

A farmer approached Glen Vaughn, one of the DynCorp medics, and told him that he had pains in his back which made it hard to move his legs. He had gone to the Dutch base to be treated at the hospital there, but had been turned away. Vaughn, a stocky former fireman from Denton, Texas, began to examine him. As he did so, another man made a lunge for Vaughn's holstered sidearm. Vaughn jerked backward and the man dodged away, grinning. "I'll shoot you in the head if you try that again," Vaughn said in English.

Nazeem and a couple of Afghan policemen formed a protective circle around Vaughn. The other farmers, seeing Vaughn's alarm as a display of fear, laughed at him. Nazeem spoke to them sharply, saying, "I'm Pashtun, too, like you, and I'm not afraid of you." Staring coldly at him, the oldest farmer, a gray-bearded man, said, "You will be afraid when the time comes."

Back at the base camp, Wankel changed into shorts and a T-shirt decorated with the Stars and Stripes and an eagle, and lay down on the cot in his tent to read Bob Woodward's most recent book, "State of Denial." On balance, he was pleased with how the first day had gone; it had been a good start. "It's not fair to judge the eradication program against the figures for drug cultivation, because it's really just getting off the ground," Wankel said. "Corruption is a huge problem, though, and no doubt some of the guys we're involved with are up to some stuff. But you just have to try and steer them."

Douglas Wankel (right), an anti-narcotics official, and Abdul Hakim Munib (with glasses), the governor of Uruzgan.

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On the second day of the operation, the local police, who were supposed to show up at seven, were forty minutes late and, when they finally arrived, there were only a few of them. This was worrisome, because after the previous day's foray there was more potential for trouble; the presence of the police was seen as a guarantee of local coöperation, and therefore of security for the eradication force. Mick Hogan, a tall, muscular man of fifty with a silver beard, who was Wankel's manager in the field, stood silently, watching the convoy get ready. Hogan was a veteran of Special Forces anti-guerrilla operations in Central America during the nineteen-eighties, and of the I.N.L.'s counter-narcotics programs in Colombia, Guatemala, and Bolivia. He remarked evenly that the late arrival of the policemen was "not a good sign."

The convoy moved out anyway. We travelled slowly in a long line of vehicles. I was in a Ford truck with Eric Sherepita, one of two DynCorp commanders of the operation in Uruzgan. Sherepita was a burly man in his thirties with a shaved head and tattoos, a goatee and a Fu Manchu mustache. The other DynCorp commander, Kelly, a former policeman from Arizona, also goateed, was driving another. The remaining DynCorp trucks were packed with guns and men, including two specialists in land-mine and explosives removal: a husky, soft-spoken Samoan named Suani, who often wore a sarong and draped a kaffiyeh over his head, like an Arab sheikh, and Anton, a Croatian from Mostar, who rarely spoke.

As we entered the nearest village, children gathered along the track waving and holding their hands out, and some of the DynCorp men tossed them gray plastic packages. "Halal M.R.E.s," Sherepita explained. "The kids love them." He threw a few, and the children scrambled to retrieve them. Some opened them immediately and began eating the contents, while others threw them under the tires of the trucks to watch them get squashed.

The area chosen for the day's mission had been relayed to Wankel and the DynCorp team by the Dutch only the evening before. The drive, on the opposite bank of the river from the camp, took nearly two hours. We bivouacked on some sloping open ground above a village on a bluff. Below were poppy fields and the river; behind us was a row of bare hills and, a half mile or so farther away, the steep flanks of the mountains.

Two helicopters, called Diablo One and Diablo Two, flew in and landed on the ground near us, disgorging a small group of television journalists, including

Dutchmen and a couple of Australians, who were to film that morning's eradication work. They stumbled toward us, clutching plastic water bottles and their gear, and were introduced to Doug Wankel, who led the way down the hill.

Wankel climbed on the back of an A.T.V. driven by Mick Hogan to get across a stream at the base of the bluff, and, at the last minute, one of the Dutch newsmen got on, despite Hogan's warnings that his weight would throw off the balance. The A.T.V. cleared the stream but toppled off the steep embankment on the other side. The Dutchman leaped clear; Wankel and Hogan were pitched into the field as the A.T.V. flipped over.

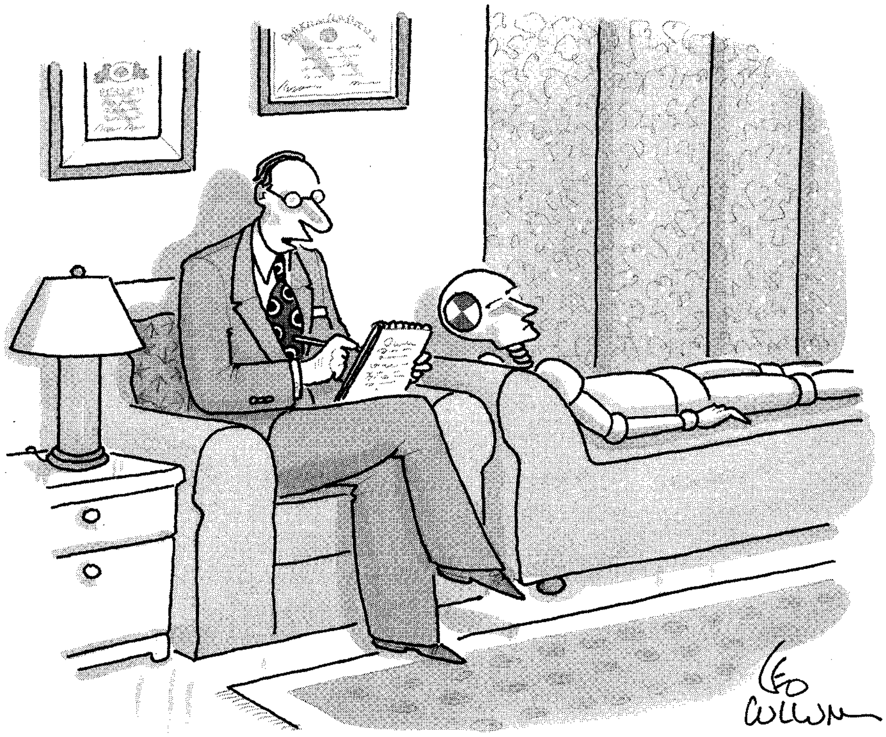
Wankel was on his back, and both his legs were pinned under the vehicle. Several of us lifted the A.T.V. and saw that his legs had deep, ugly gashes; on one, the white bone of his shin was exposed. Hogan, unhurt, began cursing the Dutchman, who had vanished. Someone brought a stretcher, and Wankel, managing a pained smile, was carefully loaded onto it and carried to one of the choppers, which would fly him to the Tirin Kot base.

Policemen were already busy whacking and crushing poppies, using sticks and A.T.V.s. They were spread out over several hundred metres. Unlike the day before, there were no children or any other civilians in sight.

As I walked along a trail between the poppy fields, gunshots rang out. Men began running, taking cover, and looking up toward the village on the bluff; the firing seemed to be coming from the mud-walled compounds there. Kelly, the ex-cop from Arizona, yelled at me to take cover. I headed toward a stand of trees with Aaron Huey, the photographer who was travelling with me; from there we could no longer see any other Americans. A group of six or seven Interior Ministry policemen—almost all of the local police had disappeared as soon as the shooting started—ran past with their guns drawn, and we followed.

Moments later, we were in an open section of the village, and under fire. There were now twenty or so policemen, in small groups bunched up against mud walls, shooting in various directions. One of them had been shot in the shoulder and was bleeding. I tried, with Huey, to make a run for where I thought the American convoy was, but we were turned back by gunfire.

Some of the policemen began pointing at a distant farm compound. "*Dushman!*"—enemy—one yelled. They fired an R.P.G. at the compound. The grenade exploded, sending up a large black burst of smoke and dust.



"And you're certain these are accidents?"

Major Khalil appeared, leading a few of the policemen and a prisoner in a brown robe; they had tied his hands behind his back with his own shawl. Huey and I joined them as they made their way down an alley and toward the fields. When we were in the middle of the poppy field, Khalil screamed, "Taliban! Get down!" Then he and his men, firing their guns, advanced, with us among them.

We could see the helicopters flying over the village and the river, seeming to leave the area. Several of the policemen asked me why they weren't firing at our attackers. I didn't know what to tell them. (Later, I learned that they were evacuating the television journalists.)

As we approached a steep hill, from which the Afghan policemen were firing rockets and Kalashnikovs into the village, Khalil told everyone in our group to lift our hands and weapons in the air, and he began calling out loudly, identifying us to the policemen above us, telling them to hold their fire. As they covered us, we climbed the hill to join them.

It had been about ninety minutes since the shooting began. As we looked for cover on the hill, Khalil directed his men to fire into the village. Bullets came cracking at us. The prisoner, his arms still bound, crouched next to me. There was a plume of black smoke; the men said that it was one of our vehicles burning. Khalil, seemingly panicked, ordered everyone to run. (He later told me that he had seen movement below and feared that the Taliban were about to surround us.) We headed for another hill, from which I was finally able to see the convoy, about a half mile away, across a wadi.

A group of men had gathered in a large foxhole at the summit of our hill, and I spotted Mick Hogan, who was looking through his gun's scope at the village below. I crawled up to him. Below us, I saw a man dressed in black move quickly through the village and dodge out of sight behind a wall. The men in the foxhole pounded bullets in his direction.

Hogan told us to get to the convoy; the Americans wanted to pull out right away. As Huey and I headed down, one of the Afghans came running past us, pointing to a hole in his trousers where a bullet had just missed his leg. I congratulated him on his good luck. Then I spotted Kelly driving one of the white pickups and we got in with him.

We had to get back across the river, but the route we had used that morning was too dangerous; some Afghan policemen had just been ambushed in an attempt to head that way. Our way to the river cut between two walled orchards, and the convoy, a long line of slow-moving trucks, was taking fire from both sides. Kelly called the helicopters on his radio, and soon we heard the grinding sound of the helicopters' miniguns—.30-calibre machine guns that fire up to four thousand rounds per minute.

When we reached the river's edge, we saw that one of the white pickups was stranded in the water and some of the A.T.V.s were submerged. Men were clambering about—trying to hold on to vehicles, calling for towropes—and returning fire. Kelly stopped midstream to help them. Two of the A.T.V.s were towed out, but the others, and the pickup, were abandoned. The DynCorp men ripped the radio out of the pickup so that the Taliban wouldn't take it. Kelly managed to get his truck to the other side, where the shooting continued.

Nearby, a DynCorp crew had opened full automatic fire on a group of gunmen who had moved from deeper in the orchard to the treeline on the opposite bank and were shooting at us. Aaron Huey and I took cover behind a truck as Kelly joined the fight. Rockets exploded near the Diablos, and then the choppers disappeared. (They had both been hit several times, but made it back to the base in Tirin Kot, one with a fire on board.) After a few more minutes, the decision was made to retreat.

The road was almost obscured by the dust kicked up by the trucks in front of us. We passed another orchard, and, again, there were gunshots from both sides of the road. In the back of our truck, Bulmaro Vasconcelos, a machine-gunner from Hemet, California, fired into the orchard with a heavy machine gun. I saw a military cap in the road in front of us, and then a man lying face down. We couldn't tell if he was alive or dead, and swerved to avoid running over him. It was one of the Afghan policemen. Kelly yelled for the truck behind us to pick him up.

A few seconds later, the window on Kelly's side exploded and he yelled, "Shit! I've been hit!" He grabbed his leg, but kept driving, feeling the leg with one hand. He looked at the hand: there was no blood. The bullet, evidently slowed by the metal door, had not pierced his skin. "I'm all right," he said. A bullet hit my side of the truck, and another struck the back. A minute or two later, we were out of the orchards and into more open territory, headed toward the camp. For the first time in four hours, there was no shooting.

About ten minutes after we got back to camp, we heard loud explosions coming from the river. The Dutch had dispatched an Apache helicopter to destroy the abandoned pickup with a Hellfire missile.

In addition to the man we had found in the road, who had been shot in the head and was barely alive, four Afghan policemen had been shot, of whom two were critically wounded. One was spouting blood from the femoral artery in his right leg. Another had been shot in the lung and the liver. Sylvester Pocius, known as Sly, another goateed DynCorp contractor, had been grazed on the neck by a bullet that ricocheted off the bolt of his gun. The wounded were rushed into camp for emergency treatment and driven to the Special Forces hospital. (A month later, the policeman who had been shot in the liver died of his wounds.)

Later, Major Khalil said that he had been informed that eleven other Afghans were wounded and eight killed during the attack. There was conflicting information about the identities of the dead, and uncertainty about whether the reports were accurate, but the victims were said to have included an old woman, or possibly an old man, and a twelve-year-old girl.

The eradication team remained in camp under a tight security lockdown for ten days. The camp was set up like a *kraal*, with thirty-odd trucks parked in tight groups to form a large, fanlike defensive circle. Within this perimeter, the team members pitched their tents, with the DynCorp men in one area and, in another area, the Afghan police, some of whom slept on cots in the backs of trucks. Each group had its own cookhouse tent and its own toilet truck. The Americans also had a shower truck and a laundry truck. Beyond the camp, at each point of the compass, Nepalese Gurkhas hired by DynCorp maintained sentry positions in foxholes and in sandbagged machine-gun nests on the roofs of trucks.

The DynCorp men spent their time swapping stories, watching DVDs, surfing the Web, and catching up on e-mail; the camp, which had its own satellite gear, was wireless. Camp life soon acquired a "Groundhog Day" routine. Every afternoon, Pocius and Vasconcelos lifted weights, and then Pocius sunbathed. Tyrone, a fifty-seven-year-old logistics man, called his wife in North Carolina every evening, using Skype, and talked to her for hours. Kevin, a personable Ohioan, brewed Starbucks coffee that had been sent from home.

Most of the DynCorp men were Southerners or Midwesterners, and all but a couple were ex-military men. Almost all had children, and told me they had become contractors because they were able to earn a great deal more money than in civilian jobs back home. Their contracts obliged them to stay in Afghanistan for six-month periods, after which they received a month of paid vacation. Money was not their only motivation, however. Many spoke about wanting to recapture the camaraderie and adventure of military life. Being in Afghanistan also gave them a sense of purpose: they were patriotic, and saw themselves as participating in the war on terror.

Hook, a former Army man and prison guard, had been hired by DynCorp just the month before. One morning, he said, "The real problem in this war on terror is you guys, the press. Ties our hands. The only way to fight this is to give them back the same medicine, like Operation Phoenix, in Vietnam. My Lai—what Calley did there was probably just on orders."

Tyrone, who was a Vietnam veteran, said he thought that the war could not be won the way it was being waged. "We're really not fighting it," he said. "The Taliban are just right over the ridge there. The Dutch are tolerating it.”

By this time, news had circulated that Khalil’s prisoner, who had been tied up and kept in a tent for four or five days and interrogated at the U.S. Special Forces base, had talked. Allegedly, the day before the attack, men from another village had brought in weapons and a group of fifteen to twenty Taliban fighters, and had told the village men to evacuate women and children. (The A.E.F. men estimated that there were forty to fifty attackers in all.)

Mick Hogan had debriefed each of the men who had been in the field on the day of the attack, and he was angry at the Dutch. They hadn’t sent an ambulance for the critically wounded Afghan policemen, he said, or treated them at their hospital. From the beginning, Hogan said, the Dutch had issued petty rules that had made it harder to accomplish the mission. “They gave us a grid less than nine clicks by two to operate in, and something my time in the S.F. taught me was that unpredictability is the key to survival,” Hogan said. “The more people know what you’re doing, the more likely something bad can happen to you. They said, ‘Oh, you can’t go here, you can’t cross the river there.’ Makes you think that our so-called international allies are not our friends.”

SUNDAY MORNING WALK

Frost on the green.
The ducks cold-footing it across the grass
Beside the college moat

Meet a clutch of matrons
Collared-up in Barbours
Walking their collies
Freshly brushed by Gainsborough.

Buoyed by the world’s supply
Of rosemary sprigs
Packed under glass,

The moorcock emerging from the reeds
Does a hesitation step
As though dancing to Piazzolla.
Cool shoes, if I may say so.

In front of the boathouses
The rowers rigging fulcrums to the shells
Bite off their gloves
To push in pins,

And the metal shines
Just short of a glitter
Because the light, though Croesus-rich,
Is kiss-soft.

One of the senior members of the A.E.F. told me that it appeared that the fields in the target area belonged primarily to the Alkozai tribe, leaving those of the Populzai—Karzai’s tribe—relatively untouched. “So the Dutch, wittingly or unwittingly, appear to be favoring the Populzai,” he said. “By targeting the Alkozai, it was almost mandated that they would retaliate.”

After hearing so many recriminations, I tried to arrange an interview with the Dutch military. They declined to speak to me while I was in Uruzgan. But when I returned to Kabul I spoke to a European official based in Afghanistan, who dismissed the reports that the Dutch had been unwilling to treat the wounded; the problem was that their hospital had been full at the time, and the Special Forces hospital had had space available. (Later, a Dutch government spokesman said that they had never received a formal request for an ambulance. The spokesman also said that the target area was selected in conjunction with the Afghan government and others in the international community, and was meant to be “tribal neutral,” although there were other factors at work, including security and the richness of the fields.)

The ambush, the European official said, should not have surprised anyone, especially that late in the season. “You can put the eradication team wherever you want, but it’s not really a fighting force,” he said. “If you get attacked, you can only retreat.”

One problem with eradication operations such as the one in Uruzgan is that they tend to set up confrontations between armed men and poor farmers: the only American a farmer ever meets might be the one who is destroying his harvest, rather than someone who is building a school or a clinic. Another problem is that knocking down or plowing under the flowers is time-consuming. “The per-acre cost of forced eradication is also excruciatingly high,” Chris Alexander said.

A way around this would be to spray the poppies with chemicals from the air, as coca is eradicated in Colombia. This is a highly controversial approach, however, because of its indiscriminate destruction of crops and the uncertainty about its health effects. As a compromise, the Americans have strongly advocated ground spraying from tractors. The Western official said, “You have to get past manual eradication and discuss chemical spraying. The Europeans are adamantly opposed—just look at the whole genetically-modified-crop debate in Europe. If they decided to spray over the next few months, we would need to have an information campaign on spraying, telling the Afghans they’re not going to have two-headed babies but also telling them so in Europe, in The Hague and in Rome.”

The official said that last year Karzai had authorized ground spraying, but, under pressure from the Europeans, decided to wait. “Karzai is balancing a lot on this. If the international community

Under the bridge, the iron ribs
Form a pigeon loft,
A pit lane of sports saloons
Testing their engines.

The final year
Of the finishing school for swans
Passes in review,
Watched by the cob, his nibs,

Who at Bayreuth once
Had a glide-on role
In "Lohengrin,"
But this is better.

Winter regatta,
Unspoiled by even
Yesterday's litter
Spilling from the bins,

Is it any wonder
That I never left you?
Remember this day,
It's already melting.

—*Clive James*

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goes to him in a united front, he can make the hard decision. But on this issue we weren't united, and he couldn't make the decision."

The narcotics issue, like almost every other piece in the Afghan jigsaw puzzle, poses a conundrum to the Americans. While attempting to pacify Afghanistan, they must stabilize it politically and rebuild it, too; as the eradication issue shows, the actions required for one can undermine the other. Added to this is the absence of a unified international strategy, and the resultant infighting between the U.S. and its allies. There is disunity not only on the opium problem but on how to fight the war. Doug Wankel said, "Americans have this image of being cowboyish and pushy, and we've suffered in this from what's happened in Iraq."

Distracted by Iraq, the U.S. only belatedly began serious counter-narcotics and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. In the vacuum, the Taliban returned, and most of the foreign experts and Afghan officials I met with acknowledged that they, not NATO or the Karzai government, held the initiative. No one speaks with any assurance about "winning"—only about the long road ahead. In Chris Alexander's carefully phrased appraisal, "The trend is not monolithically positive."

Karzai, in his efforts to mollify his restive fellow-Pashtuns, has made conciliatory gestures to the Taliban which have alienated Tajiks and Uzbeks who helped him come to power. There is the danger of a broader divide between north and south. A coalition of former warlords and politicians predominantly from the north recently formed an opposition front to challenge Karzai, who is up for reëlection in 2009. A group of retired generals—again, mostly northerners—have called for a more hard-line approach in the war against the Taliban. While in Afghanistan, I travelled several hours north of Kabul to the Panjshir Valley, and met with Ahmed Kushah, a nephew of the assassinated Ahmed Shah Massoud. Kushah was living with a band of armed followers high up in the mountains, to prepare for the new guerrilla war he believes is coming. He told me he felt certain that Karzai's policies, backed by the West, would lead to a Taliban takeover, and he was preparing to defend the north, just as his uncle had once done. He told me that although he had no immediate plans to attack Americans, he would do so if they moved against him. Islam, he told me, was his inspiration.

Among ordinary Afghans, conspiracy theories are rife. Major Khalil asked me one day, "If the Americans can put a man on the moon, why can't they defeat the Taliban?" His implication was that, if the Americans didn't win, it was because they didn't want to badly enough.

I arranged to be escorted to the poppy fields by a local police unit, so that I could speak to farmers freely, without members of the eradication team present. The policemen, who arrived in a pickup, did not inspire confidence. There were six or seven young men, most of them wearing shalwar kameez instead of uniforms, under the command of a tiny hunchbacked man who walked with difficulty, using crutches. He wore a rakish turban and a dirty robe, and he spat constantly. Suppressing my misgivings, I went with them.

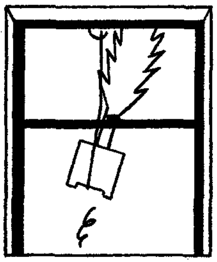
At the edge of a wadi, we found several men and a boy at work, harvesting opium. The policemen stood at the edges of the field as I waded into the poppies with a translator, a local young man named Saibullah, who had learned English as a refugee in Pakistan. Once he had explained that I merely wanted to see how they collected the drug, they were friendly enough. The boy showed me how he ran his thumb over the oozing bulbs and then scraped the gooey brown opium into a glass he held in his other hand. When the glass was full, he emptied the contents into a large bowl. It was 8:20 A.M. and the harvesters had been working since 5 A.M. It looked as though they had already collected about two kilos. Nazir Ahmad, a bearded man in a long, opium-stained smock, said that he had twenty people to support and four jiribs of land, from which he expected to harvest twenty-five kilos of opium.

The development projects meant to

offset the loss of the poppies didn't benefit people like him, Ahmad said. "The Karzai government doesn't give the money to poor farmers growing poppy. It gives it only to its friends who grow it"—corrupt officials and landowners with political influence. (Many of the farmers were sharecroppers.) "We would be happy to stop growing opium if they would give us some help, and stop giving the money meant for us to thieves." Instead of receiving aid from government officials, Ahmad said, "if they tell us to break the poppies, we must pay them not to."

Ahmad's younger brother said that he had just returned from the harvest in Helmand Province—the source of forty per cent of Afghanistan's opium. The opium farmers there often had to pay bribes, he said. This echoed what the DynCorp men had told me about their experience in Helmand the previous month. There, after *shuras* with elders, the local policemen had guided them to certain fields while leaving others intact. Presumably, the farmers whose poppies were spared were well connected or had paid bribes. Chris Alexander told me, "In Helmand and Uruzgan, eradication has been subject to political manipulation and corruption. It has also proven virtually impossible to conduct in districts where the Taliban are relatively strong, thereby inevitably penalizing farmers in pro-government districts."

Before I left the field, Ahmad looked at me directly and said, "I know the opium is turned into drugs that destroy young people, and I am sorry, but we are twenty people and we have no help. We must grow it to survive. If we get help, we won't grow it next year."



Driving up out of the wadi, we had to wait for a convoy of three armored personnel carriers, with Australian flags, to pass. In Tirin Kot, we parked in the traffic circle at the center of town, where a large group of turbaned and bearded young men had gathered, waiting for opium farmers to come along and hire them as day laborers. The men looked at us with suspicion. Several covered their faces. One of the men was the farmer who had tried to grab Glen Vaughn's pistol on the first day of the mission. Saibullah, the translator, said, "We should go now—there may be suiciders." As we drove on, he said that there were Taliban among the men in the crowd: "They were the ones who covered their faces."

When we returned to the camp, I heard that a suicide bomber on a motorbike had blown himself up next to an Australian convoy, wounding a number of soldiers and civilians. Most likely, this was the convoy that had passed us.

There were doubts about whether the eradication would resume; the Embassy in Kabul was not sure that it was worth the risk. The Americans had always been cagey about the number of acres of poppies they hoped to eradicate in Uruzgan, claiming that it "wasn't about numbers" but about making their presence felt. They had intended to spend at least ten days in the fields, and thus far had managed only one—in which, by their rough calculations, they had destroyed less than two hundred acres. (By contrast, earlier this year, in a month-long operation in Helmand, they had destroyed an estimated seventy-five hundred acres—out of an estimated hundred and seventy-five thousand planted with poppies.)

"We've been and shown we can mess things up," Hogan said. "Sure, we've taken our losses, too, and maybe we lost the battle, but we haven't lost the war."

After a week, the DynCorp men were told that the Uruzgan mission was complete. The Nepalese Gurkhas slaughtered a goat in celebration. That night, however, Hogan reported that the U.S. Ambassador and the Afghan Minister of the Interior had decided that the team should not leave Uruzgan without a final show of force.

Major Khalil came to see Kelly. The local Afghan Army commander, he said, was worried about accompanying the eradication team into the fields—one of his patrols had recently been ambushed.

"So what are you saying?" Kelly asked warily.

Khalil suggested another *shura*, to get the coöperation of the village elders. He also urged that they move quickly, because the harvest was almost over—the fields were already "trash." Kelly said, "It's true, the fields are shit now, but that's not the point. The point is to go back in there and kick some ass."

Kelly told Khalil to set up the *shura*. Rolling his eyes, he said, "This is just the way it was in Helmand, with the *shuras* repeating themselves over and over again, all the same fucking shit. It's a stalling tactic."

Limping, but managing without crutches, Doug Wankel reappeared the next morning. He had flown from Kabul with Gene Trammell, the head of the DynCorp counter-narcotics program. Colonel Marouf, Major Khalil's superior on the A.E.F., met us at the governor's palace with the local police chief, Qassem. The errant governor of Uruzgan, Abdul Hakim Munib, who had finally returned from Kabul, arrived a few moments later.

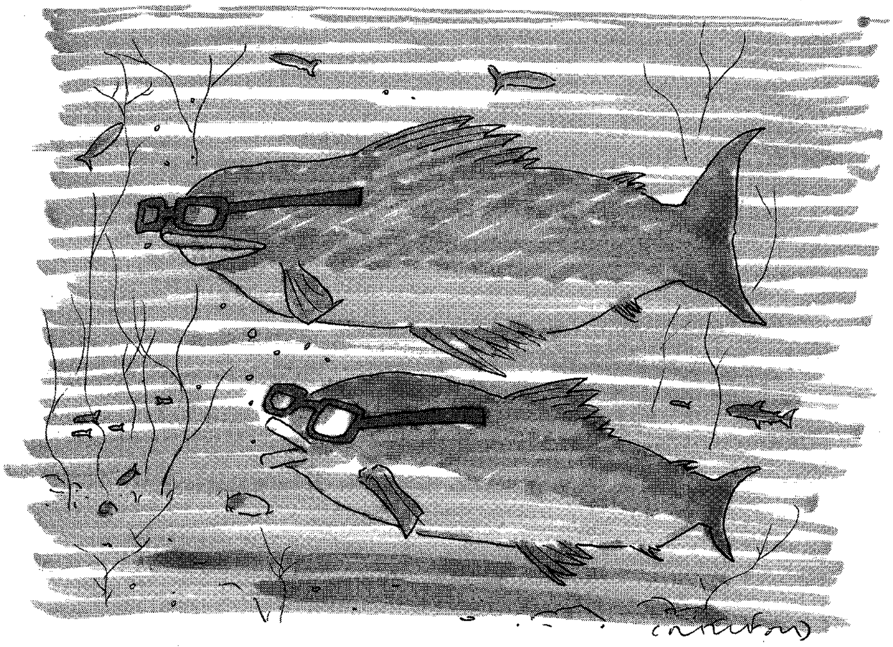
Munib began talking about his commitment to eradication. "We've tried to do as much as we could, but we're hampered by lack of tools and equipment," he said. "I was happy when I heard you were coming." The Americans listened quietly, their faces neutral. Then Munib announced that he had met with the elders, and they had agreed to eradicate half their poppy fields by themselves—there was no need for the A.E.F. to do it.

Qassem stood up. He said that there were two areas where eradication could still be conducted. Before he could continue, Wankel cut him off, and announced that President Karzai and the Afghan minister of defense had been informed about the attack on the team. "Kabul says it's very important for the government to come back and eradicate for one, two days in the area where it happened, to show that the government has the ability to exercise the rule of law in Tirin Kot," Wankel said.

Qassem said, "We can come and show you where to go."

"You will have to come early. We leave at seven sharp," Wankel said, standing up. "Thank you, that's it."

Qassem arrived on time, along with several jeeploads of his policemen. I rode with David Lockyear, the Tennessean. Overhead, we could hear the whine of a Special Forces drone. We passed a man on a motorbike; Lockyear exclaimed that he had a Kalashnikov, and radioed to the Af-



"Leave Lou to me. I'll eat him and then you can run the company."

ghan police truck behind us to pick him up. The poppy fields were on both sides of the road where we had come under fire during our retreat, running toward the river on one side and toward the desert on the other. Several fields were already brown, drying in the sun, but others were still green. The eradication team entered the fields on the desert side and began whacking the stalks with sticks.

Several farmers ran up to Colonel Marouf, yelling furiously, "We are all Muslims! Why are you doing this to us?" Marouf told the policemen to keep them at the edge of the fields. Allen Barnes, one of the DynCorp medics, was standing guard nearby. He was wearing a khaki kilt, claiming relief from the heat and some Celtic ancestry. One of the other contractors called him a "gear queer." Barnes laughed.

Marouf called off the men once they had destroyed two-thirds of the poppies—to leave the farmers with something, he said. The farmers were released. As they left, one of them said to Marouf, "If we had known you were coming to do this, we would have fought you." Calling after them, Marouf retorted, "When you fight, you use your women and children as shields!"

Governor Munib and the intelligence chief arrived with a clutch of elders. They made their way to a shady spot under a mulberry tree at the edge of a field and sat down. I saw the hunchbacked police commander approach Munib and kiss his hand. Wankel went over and told Munib that the plan for the next day was to destroy poppies on the other side of the road, down by the river, where the fields were bigger and richer, in order to be "fair." Munib just nodded.

Afterward, I asked Munib about the links between the Taliban and the opium trade; he had, after all, been a deputy minister in the Taliban regime.

"In the areas where the poppies are cultivated and there are Taliban, it is under their influence. But elsewhere it is not fully so," Munib said. "We know that the Taliban are telling the people to oppose the government's eradication strategy, but, as you also know, the Taliban, when they were in government, eradicated all the poppies."

He added, "When the Taliban imposed their decree, there was followup. They were capturing and punishing people, so the people stopped growing opium. Also, there was no opposition—the Taliban had all the power."

Munib and the elders did not show up the next day. Qassem and his local policemen appeared, however, with a village councillor. They led the eradication force to the same side of the road where we had been the day before. Doug Wankel was furious. After the policemen had spent half an hour whacking one small field with their sticks, he told them to stop. He said again that he wished to eradicate poppies in the fields toward the river. The councillor told Wankel that he would not accompany the men if they went on that side of the road, nor could he guarantee their safety.

Wankel insisted. He ordered Major Khalil and the DynCorp men to set up a good security perimeter. Qassem and his men stayed behind. Wankel and Trammell and a group of men, guns drawn, walked down into the fields below, a checkerboard of green wheat and luxuriant poppies. After a few minutes, Marouf received a call from Qassem on his field radio saying that he and his men were pulling out. Alarm spread among the Americans and the Afghan policemen who were with us.

"Someone powerful obviously controls this area," Wankel told Trammell. "The local authorities' leaving has sent out the message that we're unsafe and can be attacked. We should go."

We climbed back up the bluff. Qassem was standing there with several of his men. Doug Wankel didn't approach him. Marouf went to talk to Qassem, and then came back and told Wankel, "The police say you can eradicate *there*"—he pointed up to the other side of the road.

"Fuck the police," Wankel snarled, and he turned and walked away. He told his men that it was over.

I walked past one of the jeeps where some of Qassem's policemen, dressed in robes and sparkly skullcaps, were laughing and talking with the opium growers. I caught a whiff of something burning as I passed. They were smoking hashish.

Back at camp, everyone was in a bad mood. Hook, the former prison guard, remarked, "We ought to take all those guys and hang them in public, beginning with the governor." He laughed, and added, "Good thing I'm not an idealist—I'm just here for the money." ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

An audio interview with Jon Lee Anderson and more photographs by Aaron Huey.

OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS

ON IMPACT

A meteorite mystery in New Jersey.

BY IAN FRAZIER

People get excited when strange objects fall from the sky. We seek portents and meanings, we venerate the object, and we horripilate at the uncanny scent of our beginnings, or end. Even wised up by science as we are, we tend to freak. Here in the state of New Jersey, there hadn't been much call for that kind of excitement since 1829, when a meteorite fell on the town of Deal, in Monmouth County. At about twelve-thirty in the morning on August 15th, a fireball was seen over the town and multiple booms were heard. Several meteorite fragments may have been present, but only one was ever found—a stone meteorite about three inches long. In later years, the Deal Meteorite could be seen on display in Philadelphia at the Academy of Natural Sciences, which sold it with other museum specimens to a consortium of mineral dealers last fall; it is possibly in Colorado now.

A hundred and seventy-seven years and some months after the Deal Meteorite, an object descending at a steep angle and a high rate of speed shot through the roof of a house in Freehold Township—coincidentally also in Monmouth County. On January 2, 2007, at about four-thirty in the afternoon, Mrs. Sundari Nageswaran was standing by the back door of her son's Canterbury-model house, in a development of many similar houses, when she heard a loud bang. Thinking it only a straggling firecracker from the holiday celebrations of the day before, she did not mention it to her husband, her seven-year-old grandson, just home from school, or her son, Srinivasan Nageswaran, who was at work in his office in the basement. Srinivasan, called Srini, is an information-technology consultant who does business both at clients' sites and from home.

Soon afterward, Srini's wife arrived from work, and the whole family had dinner. In the evening, while getting ready for bed, Srini went into the second-floor bathroom off the master bedroom to wash up. When he opened the door, he saw shreds of insulation, fragments of Sheetrock, and pulverized plaster dust all over the counter and the floor. In the bathroom ceiling above the sink was a hole about four inches long. The hole was clean and vaguely deltoid in shape on the side closer to the roof, and more ragged on the bathroom side, with a few pieces of Sheetrock held by liner paper dangling down. Climbing onto the counter and examining the hole more closely, he saw that it also seemed to go through the roof, just a foot or so above.

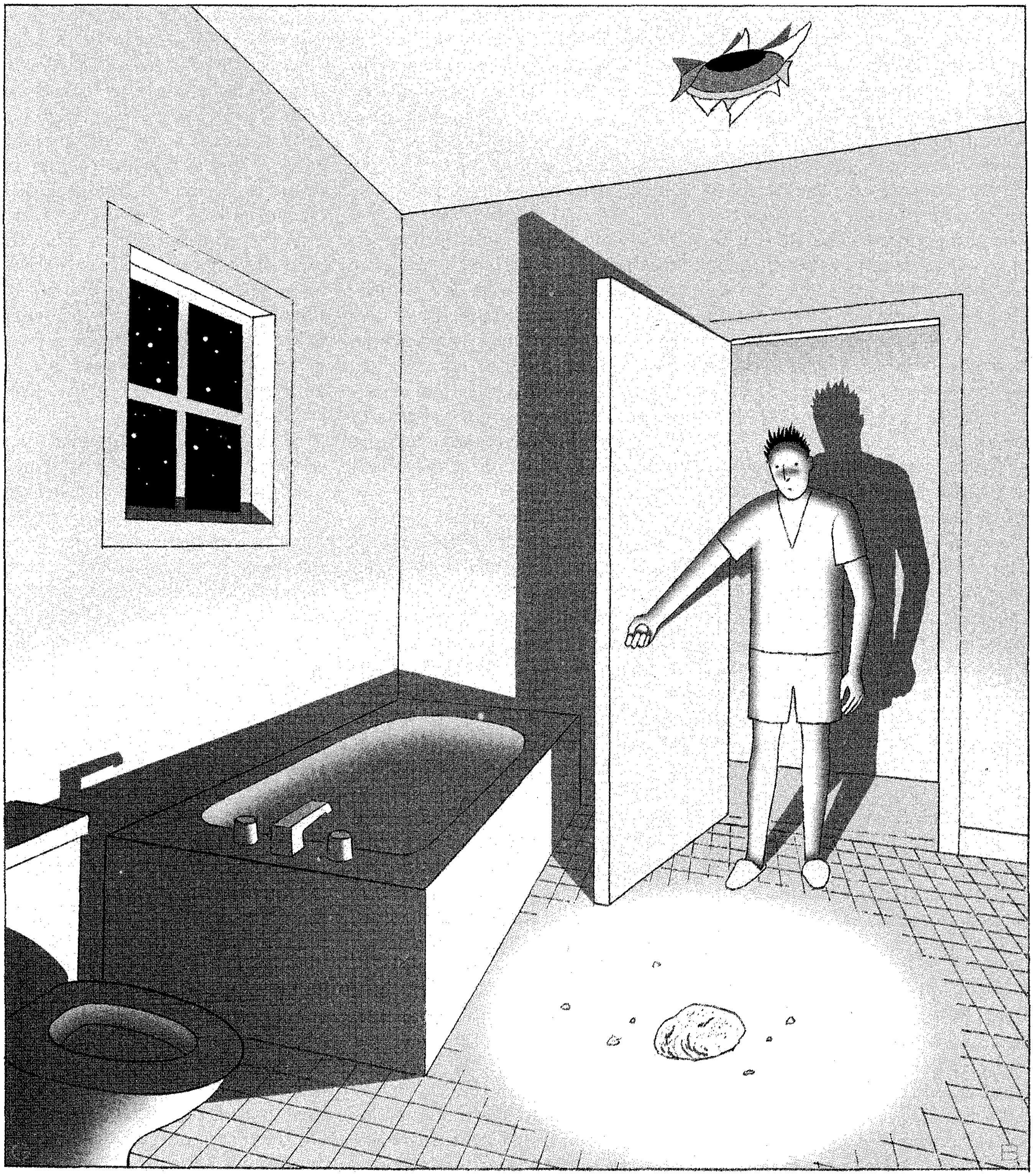
Srini called his wife, who observed the damage and then got a broom and began to sweep up the mess. When she lifted the green shag bathmat on the floor, she saw that a square of the porcelain tile beneath it had been shattered into many small pieces held in place by the mat. The broken tile lined up with the hole in the ceiling at an angle of about eighty degrees. In the bathroom wall, a foot or so above the broken tile, was a dent. While sweeping behind the toilet, Srini's wife noticed an object about three and a half inches long. It was a dull brownish-silver in color and shaped sort of like a small croissant. She picked it up and gave it to Srini, and said, "Look, this is what caused it." The object was about the same shape as the hole. Srini looked at the hole in the ceiling again and pushed a broomstick through to the outside. Whatever the object was, it apparently had struck with such force as to penetrate the shingle, three-quarter-inch plywood, eight inches of fibreglass insulation, and half-inch Sheetrock, with enough energy left over to shatter the tile and dent the wall. Anybody standing at the sink when it hit, he reflected, would probably have been killed.

At first, Srini and his wife thought the object might be a part from a satellite or an airplane. It had a lot of weight for its size, though, and somehow did not look like anything from this world. Srini's parents joined the discussion. The family held the object in their palms and passed it around. Srini's father was the first to suggest that it might be a meteorite.

In the morning, the Nageswarans called the Freehold Township police. At about nine-thirty, two officers came, looked at the hole in the ceiling and in the roof, wrote up a report on the damage, and took the mysterious object with them for identification. When the officers returned to the station, they left the object in the vehicle; Lieutenant Robert A. Brightman, a coördinator of the police investigation, wanted to keep the risk of spreading any radiation contamination to a minimum, should the object turn out to be radioactive. After a check with a Geiger counter proved that not to be the case, the object was brought into the station and put into a clear plastic cylinder used to hold pieces of evidence.

Two investigators from the office of the Federal Aviation Administration in Saddle River arrived at about noon. The F.A.A. gives out very little information. Jim Peters, a spokesman at the F.A.A. office in Queens, told me that F.A.A. investigators are not available to talk to the press, because they don't understand the complexities of dealing with the media. In any event, the investigators examined the object and photographed it at the police station for several hours. Then they told Lieutenant Brightman that the object showed no sign of having been manufactured or machined and was not a part of an aircraft. Arlene Murray, a higher-

In the United States, a meteorite is held to belong to whoever owns the property on which it lands.



GUY BILLOUT

up at the F.A.A., informed the press of this finding later in the day.

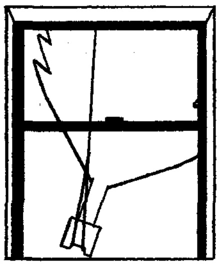
Meanwhile, people who are paid to listen to police scanners for interesting developments heard that the Freeport Township police were investigating an object of unknown origin that had fallen from the sky. Those people told other people, with predictable results. By late afternoon, so many reporters and camera crews had shown up at the station that Lieutenant Brightman held a press conference to answer the questions in an organized way. He did not have much news to offer, besides the F.A.A.'s verdict and his assurance that the investigation would go on.

Scientists came to examine the object the following day. Wanting more than one opinion, Lieutenant Brightman asked the help of Peter Elliott, a metallurgist from Colts Neck, and Jeremy S. Delaney, a researcher in the Department of Geological Sciences at Rutgers University. Peter Elliott is an expert on distressed and corroded metals who has studied iron meteorites and has a Ph.D. from the University of Manchester, in England. Jeremy Delaney has worked on meteorites for thirty years and has published many articles about the subject in scientific journals. He brought along Gail Ashley, a sedimentologist at Rutgers who also happens to be his wife, and Claire Condie, a student.

The scientists measured the object (9.6 centimetres, or about three and three-quarters inches long), weighed it (377 grams, or about thirteen ounces), and looked at it through a hand lens. The Nageswarans had requested that no tests be done that would alter the object physically. Most meteorites have a fusion crust of oxidized or melted material on the outside as a result of coming through Earth's atmosphere; this object seemed to lack that, though it did have smooth areas on one side where molten material might have flowed and cooled. The scientists also brought up pictures of meteorites on their laptops and compared the object with them.

Judging by its density, magnetism, surface textures, appearance, and provenance, the scientists concluded that the object was probably an iron meteorite. To know for certain that an object is a meteorite you have to cut into it. Only by looking at a cross-section under a microscope can you tell, first, if an object is a meteorite and, second, what kind of meteorite it is. The scientists emphasized that a cross-section test should be done. Short of that, Jeremy Delaney said he was as sure the Nageswarans' object was a meteorite as he could be.

For Lieutenant Brightman, this wrapped up the police investigation. The scientists' opinion combined with the verdict of the F.A.A. persuaded him that the property damage at the Nageswarans' had not been caused by any person. He phoned the family, told them what the scientists had said, and told them they could come down and pick up their evidence. To satisfy the curiosity of reporters, science centers, planetariums, etc., who had been calling all day, he sent out an updated press release. Privately, he did not let himself get excited about having examined and handled an object from outer space. "I made no value decision of any kind," he told me, "especially in light of the technology for creating objects that exists today."



A meteorite is a meteoroid that falls to earth. Most meteoroids don't, but burn out in the atmosphere as meteors, or shooting stars. Given the Earth's surface composition, meteorites have a seventy-one-per-cent chance of landing in water. Those odds, plus the atmospheric filter, keep the number of known meteorites down. Meteorites are given names based on the place of their discovery. Cambridge University publishes a catalogue that lists twenty-two thousand five hundred and seven meteorites, a number that includes the nearly twenty thousand, most of them small, that have been found in the cold desert of Antarctica and the hot deserts of Africa. Visibility is, of course, a factor; in some states and countries, no meteorite has ever been found.

Most meteorites come from the asteroid belt, about a hundred million miles away. The asteroid belt is made up of fragments left over from the formation of the solar system; these fragments, some of them hundreds of kilometres in length and some with their own moons, occupy a solar orbit between Mars and Jupiter. The big fragments are called asteroids. Scientists sometimes refer to the asteroid belt as the junk yard of the solar system, and, as in any junk yard, things rattle around. Collision, the process by which the planets were assembled, has slowed in the intervening billions of years, but it is still going on. Objects crash into one another, collisions lead to other collisions; as fragments fly into new orbits, those orbits approach Earth's, coincidences happen, and gravity pulls the fragments in.

Meteorites are of three kinds: stones, irons, and stony irons. Each corresponds to a different part of planet formation. The stones resemble pieces of planetary crust and mantle, the irons the planet cores, and the stony irons the transitional area between core and mantle. In some stony irons, translucent crystalline structures interpenetrate with opaque mantle rock. Collectors sometimes cut stony irons into thin slices and illuminate them from one side for a gorgeous stained-glass effect. Only one per cent of all meteorites are stony irons. Five per cent are irons, and the remaining ninety-four per cent are stones.

There are also meteorites from Mars. In the nineteen-seventies and eighties, several of them were found in Antarctica. Comparison with information about Mars rocks sent back by the Viking spacecraft in 1975 confirmed these meteorites' origin. Evidently, cratering impacts on Mars a hundred million to three hundred million years ago knocked pieces clear of that planet's gravity, and they later ended up on Earth after the pattern of asteroid-belt meteorites. In the nineteen-nineties, astrogeologists examining the Mars meteorites found what seemed to be traces of primitive bacterial forms of life. This made news because of the speculation that life on Earth could have begun with life forms arriving aboard a meteorite. Since then, further investigation has shown that the intriguing traces are probably not related to any kind of life.

Similarly, a number of meteorites have been identified as having come from the moon. Chemical matchups with lunar rocks brought back by the Apollo astronauts provided the proof. Among collectors, lunar and Martian meteorites are the most highly prized by far. Asteroid-belt meteorites sell by the gram; lunar and Martian meteorites sell by the milligram.

The fact that fragments of Mars have wound up on Earth does not imply, in all likelihood, that the reverse is true. Probably there are no Earth meteorites on Mars. The reason for this is that the general gravitational flow of the solar system is toward the sun; for pieces of Earth to reach Mars they would have to travel upstream, gravitationally. Chances are greater that Earth meteorites have reached Venus and Mercury, because those planets are between the sun and us. Of course, we can be sure that certain objects of earthly origin are now on Mars, because we shot them there—including the aforementioned Viking, the Mars Pathfinder in 1997, and in 2006 the Mars rovers Spirit and Opportunity. On the moon, our manned and unmanned missions have left all kinds of relics of ourselves—cameras, nuclear-fuel casks, discarded plastic rock-sample bags, golf balls, a color photograph of the astronaut Charles Duke and his wife and their two children, and many astronaut footprints, preserved forever in the moon's absence of atmosphere.

More prosaically, the bulk of what we launch into space does not disappear permanently into the vastness but, instead, orbits the Earth for some unspecified period of time and then comes back down. The proliferation of old satellites and other space junk in Earth orbit is a subject of recurring concern. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration knows of approximately eleven thousand pieces of orbital debris larger than four inches long. Over the past forty years, pieces of debris have fallen back to earth at an average of one piece a day.

"And then on Friday at two you're scheduled to be put to death by lethal injection."

Late in January, the Nageswarans decided to let the public see their meteorite—as the newspapers were now calling it—in a one-day-only display, on a Saturday, at the Rutgers University Geology Museum. I live not far from New Brunswick, so I drove down. From across the Rutgers campus I could locate the museum by triangulating the paths of the many people heading for the building; museum directors will tell you that, among science displays, meteorites are close in popularity to dinosaurs. On the museum's second floor, just beyond the door, a murmuring crowd concentrated around a small glassed-in case beside the wall.

There were rock hounds in bluejeans and hiking boots, cardboard boxes of rocks they'd brought in for identification at their feet; geologists with loose-leaf folders; teen-age couples on dates; Rutgers personnel; and many parents carrying young children or holding their hands. The crowd's dominant color scheme, repeated in flashes on hats and sweatshirts and tote bags, was Rutgers red, a proud reminder of the school's football victory over Kansas State in the Texas Bowl the previous December. In about eight weeks, the Rutgers women's basketball team would make the school even prouder by playing in the N.C.A.A. championship game, an event with consequences, though none related to meteorites.

The line waiting to see the Nageswarans' exhibit up close stretched along the display cases. A few feet from the viewers leaning in next to the glass, a short, cheerfully emphatic man with a balding head and dark-rimmed glasses was providing commentary: "That little piece of iron (and probably cobalt and nickel) right there might be four-point-five billion years old! *Four-point-five billion!* Earth's a dynamic planet, always recycling itself, and we've never identified a rock on Earth older than about three-point-eight! And some meteorites have granules embedded in them that are from other star systems, older even than our sun! Meteorites are what we're made of! We're made of star stuff! That right there might be the very debris of which everything is made!"

During a pause, I introduced myself, and the commentator told me that he was Louis Detofsky, called Doc Rock by his geology students at Rowan University, in Glassboro, New Jersey. He then told me about a meteorite-hunting trip he had taken to Livingston Island, off Antarctica, and about the amazing wealth of meteorites there. He described photographs of some he had found in situ—little pieces of black scattered on the unlimited expanse of white.

By the door, Jeremy Delaney, the Rutgers geologist who had taken part in the identification and had helped arrange the exhibit, was trying to get away for lunch as people with questions kept stopping him. Jeremy Delaney is a tall, broad-faced man with a sheaf of white hair sitting aslant on his head like a beret. He talks with an Irish lilt, frequently widening his eyes and laughing at the amazingness of meteorites. Someone asked him the basic question—how much would this meteorite be worth? "If it's proved to be genuine, I imagine it will be very valuable, though I don't know a dollar figure exactly," he replied. "But if you remember the meteorite that hit Peekskill, New York, back in October of 1992—it came down about eight on a Friday evening, and there are some wonderful videos of it streaking across the sky of eastern Pennsylvania and upstate New York, because many people were outdoors at high-school football games that evening and they had their cameras along. Well, the meteorite hit in a residential neighborhood of Peekskill on a family's driveway, and there was a Chevy Malibu parked there, and the meteorite went right through the trunk of the Chevy and out the bottom and landed on the pavement, and because of all the interest among collectors waiting to purchase that car it became maybe the most valuable Chevy Malibu in history, and I believe the family made enough money selling it that they were able to put a daughter through college."

At least half the visitors (by my count) viewing the display took pictures of it with their cellular phones. Many also described it by telephone as they looked at it, or had others transmit pictures of them looking at it.

"How'd you like it if that fell through our bedroom wall?"

"Look at the photograph of the bathroom tile it smashed!"

"It happened January 2nd. This year!"

"I didn't realize that."

"Get a picture of just Timmy with it."

"Tell Grandma you're looking at it right now."

"Chelsea, pay attention. This is probably the only chance of your life to see a real meteorite from outer space."

Gary Weinstein, the owner of Gary's Gem Garden, in Cherry Hill, remained skeptical. After looking closely, his head held this way and that, he said, "I don't know. It looks like it's been polished with a wire wheel. And I don't see any real fusion crust there."

"You're just jealous because it didn't crash through *your* roof," the woman with him said.

"Hey, that's the excitement of it," Louis Detofsky put in. "Debate adds a freshness to it. Science is pursuit of truth, and if you're proved wrong you're happy to be proved wrong. You think that's a meteorite—O.K., prove it!" He grinned challengingly.

When my turn came at the display case, I peered at the smooth, aerodynamic, silvery object sketched with razor-fine, crystalline-straight lines. I'd never seen anything like it. Though in shape and size it sort of resembled a Christmas cookie, it possessed no domestic qualities at all. It had the burnishings of Elsewhere, as if it had been Elsewhere forever; it seemed almost to hum inaudibly with the inhuman chill of space. I moved on. When I turned around I saw the people behind me, four pre-teen-age boys, solemnly holding their cell-phone cameras at the object like small priests holding crosses at Dracula.

The scene now shifts to Arizona. Heated by an onset of meteorite fever, I remembered that some years ago, when I was flying east from Los Angeles, I had seen a huge crater in the desert. The crater turned out to be Meteor Crater, marked as a Point of Interest six miles off Interstate 40 between Flagstaff and Winslow on the Rand McNally map of Arizona. Now I decided I must see Meteor Crater up close and from the ground.

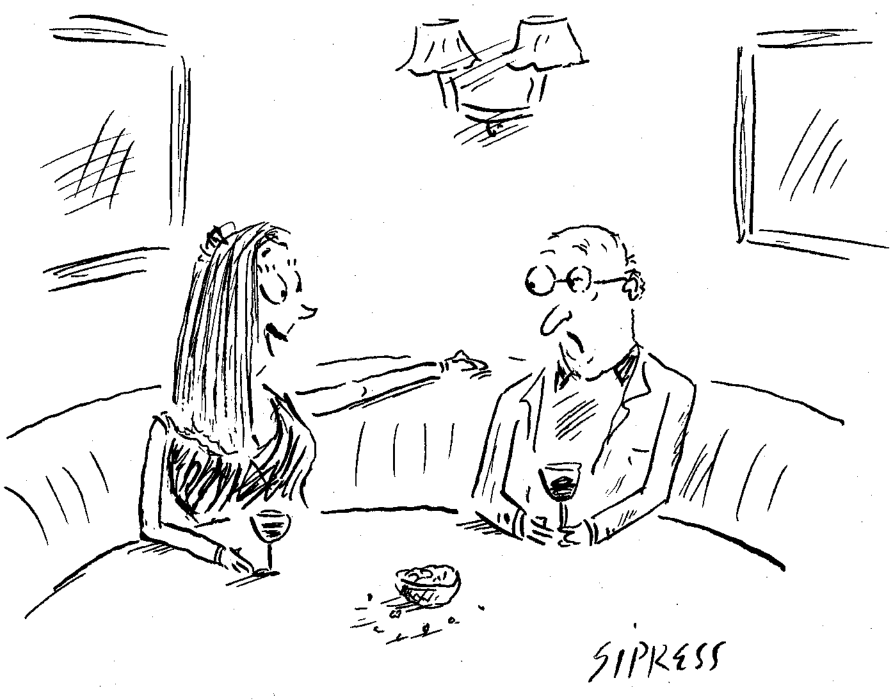
The flight from Newark to Phoenix took about five hours. The Phoenix I recall from childhood trips with my family, back in the nineteen-fifties, seemed barely a city. I remember standing on a street and seeing desert at both ends. Phoenix today is a replicating sprawl that flows around bare mountains in the hope of linking with the sprawl sprawling sprawlingly out of Las Vegas, which is also longing for union. Once the two mega-sprawls do join up, they'll head outward toward all points of the compass. Meteor Crater, a hundred and fifteen miles from Phoenix, is still in empty rangeland but may not be for long.

Two hours of crowded freeway driving, and I was almost there. Seen from miles away on the interstate, the crater suggests a giant bullet hole in the surrounding flatness, with rock lifted and folded back around its edges like curled metal around a puncture in a shot-through stop sign. And the minute you leave the highway you enter a much earlier moment in the automobile age: Route 66, the fabled Chicago-to-California road, used to run by here. In between sections of dirt lane and hardpan desert, some pieces of 66's original pavement survive. Meteor Crater was formerly one of a long list of Route 66 tourist attractions, and in the landscape of red sandstone, yellow grass, black cattle, and blue sky its weathered highway signs—"See Meteor Crater . . . Prototype for the Study of All Impact Craters in Our Galaxy"—breathe pure 1959.

The Meteor Crater Visitor Center, with museum, movie theatre, and gift shop, sits along the crater's north rim. Horizontal and vertical lines of the building comport harmoniously with the neighboring rock; the structure's previous incarnation was designed by Philip Johnson, an architect not often represented in tourist attractions along Route 66. I drove the winding asphalt up to the crater and got out in the parking lot. The place was crowded, causing me to suspect a meteorite awakening nationwide. I paid my fifteen dollars and walked to the top vantage point of the crater rim. A couple and their daughter were there, the father and little girl standing around while the mother finished a cell-phone call: "I can make it Friday, I guess. . . . Did you put a towel down on the living room? . . . O.K., I guess that wouldn't be a problem. . . . We're at the big meteor crater. . . . The *meteor crater*. . . . No, she's going to have to learn to make her own appointments . . ."

Finally, the mother hung up, and she and the father persuaded the little girl to pose for one photo with the crater in the background. "Well, that's the most we can hope for, I guess," the father said as the family went back down the trail.

Alone for the moment, I looked out across the empty air. No question about



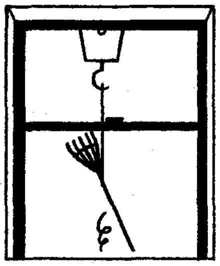
"Of course you're not old—nobody's old anymore."

it, this was one big hole. Meteor Crater is the best-preserved meteorite-impact crater on Earth. Slow rates of erosion in this dry environment and the relative recentness of the impact in geologic time have kept the crater largely unchanged. What happened was, about fifty thousand years ago an iron-and-nickel meteorite about a hundred and fifty feet across came through the atmosphere from the northeast at an angle of about eighty degrees. (The steeper a meteorite's angle of arrival, the less atmosphere there is to slow it down, and the more damage it can do.) The meteorite probably weighed several hundred thousand tons. An object that size is not hard to imagine—it would fit into any supermarket parking lot, with plenty of spaces to spare—but it was also going perhaps twenty-six thousand miles an hour, and it struck the ground with an explosive force equal to more than twenty million tons of TNT.

Physical descriptions of the meteorite have to be speculative, because most of it vaporized or melted on impact. Scientists say that a light brighter than the sun as the meteorite descended, a cataclysmic noise, a deadly shock wave radiating for miles on impact, and a dense, rising cloud of molten metal droplets and pulverized or molten rock can all be assumed.

Beyond debate is what was left behind: a roughly circular bowl-shaped crater three-quarters of a mile across and seven hundred feet deep. Debris that fell back in and sedimentation over the millennia have reduced the depth to five hundred and fifty feet, still enough (as the site's literature points out) to contain twenty football fields and two million spectators sitting on the crater's sides. The force of the collision blasted underground layers of sandstone and limestone up and out in chunks, some the size of houses, that landed in inverted order on the crater's rim, raising that part a hundred and fifty feet above the surrounding plain.

More could be said about Meteor Crater, and about impact craters in general—about the Chicxulub crater, for example, a hundred-and-ten-mile-wide "impact feature" in the ocean off the Yucatán Peninsula, where scientists believe an asteroid the size of Mt. Everest collided with Earth sixty-five million years ago and changed the global climate and possibly caused or contributed to the extinction of the dinosaurs and splashed up heat-fused silicates, called tektites, with such authority that they came down in places as far away as New Jersey, where some of them reside today beside labels in the Rutgers University Geology Museum—but instead I will limit myself to just one story.



The first geologists to see Meteor Crater, back in the late eighteen-hundreds, when it was still known as Coon Butte, did not believe that it had been made by a meteorite. The site's uniqueness worked against it; the geologists had seen plenty of features caused by volcanoes, but none caused by a meteorite, so they attributed the crater to volcanic action or an explosion of underground steam. Daniel Barringer, a rich Philadelphian who was attracted by the many meteorite fragments found in the vicinity, filed a mining claim on the crater in the hope of locating the parent object buried below. He thought that object might be an iron meteorite weighing millions of tons. Iron was selling for eighty dollars a ton at the time.

Barringer looked and looked for the meteorite but still had not found it when he died, in 1929. Because of what happened to the meteorite on impact, there was no massive object to find. In the nineteen-fifties, a graduate student in geology from Princeton named Eugene Shoemaker began to study Meteor Crater. By comparing it with craters left by nuclear testing at Yucca Flat, in Nevada, and particularly by examining a rare mineral created by extremely high pressures that he had discovered at both sites, Shoemaker proved that only the intense forces of a meteorite impact could have formed Meteor Crater.

Shoemaker went on to become one of the founders of the science of astrogeology. Largely because of him, scientists began looking at collisions as an important force in the development of the solar system. They also accepted that the craters visible on other planets and on the moon were of impact origin, and not volcanic, as had been thought previously. Shoemaker's contributions to the understanding of the moon's geology were of great use to the Apollo program. Astronauts bound for the moon came to Meteor Crater to train under his instruction for conditions they would find there. Shoemaker hoped to go on a lunar voyage himself; the dream of his life was to be the first geologist on the moon. He said he wanted to go up there and whack on the moon with his hammer.

By astronomical observation and by viewing telescope images through a stereoscopic microscope, Shoemaker and his wife, Carolyn, and an amateur astronomer named David Levy discovered the comet later known as Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9. This is the achievement for which all three are best known. Soon after their discovery, pieces of Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 crashed sequentially into Jupiter, leaving scars the size of the Earth. Photos of that impact were among the most spectacular of the images sent back by the Hubble Space Telescope in 1994. Shoemaker's studies of meteorites and astrogeology changed the way people did planetary science and helped open the path for big-event theories of biological change, most notably the theory of species extinction associated with the Chicxulub crater.

Sadly, Shoemaker never did go on an Apollo flight to the moon. In his thirties, he was diagnosed with Addison's disease, a condition of the adrenal glands, which disqualified him. In 1997, at the age of sixty-nine, he died in a car crash near Alice Springs, Australia. In 1998, a polycarbonate capsule containing an ounce of his ashes was put aboard NASA's Lunar Prospector spacecraft before its launch into lunar orbit. The Lunar Prospector circled the moon for eighteen months and performed various scientific operations. On July 31, 1999, having finished its tasks, the Lunar Prospector was sent to crash into the moon. A number of people have had their ashes shot into space; Eugene Shoemaker is the only inhabitant of Earth whose remains have ended up on another celestial body.

Had the object that struck the Nageswarans' house in Freehold Township come down instead in India, Denmark, or Switzerland, it would have been the property of the government. In America, however, a meteorite belongs to the person or entity on whose property it is found. A case more than a hundred years ago involving a meteorite that fell in an Iowa pasture established the legal precedent, and in several cases since then it has been upheld. The principle seems to make sense, and is congenial with the capitalist system, but possibilities for injustice remain; this was revealed by the Sylacauga Meteorite, the most famous American meteorite of the nineteen-fifties.

The Sylacauga Meteorite crashed through the roof of a house in Sylacauga, Alabama, at about one o'clock in the afternoon on November 30, 1954. Mrs. E. Hewlett Hodges, thirty-four, the wife of a tree surgeon, was lying on a couch in her living room when the eight-pound stone came through the ceiling, damaged a wood console Philco radio, ricocheted across the room, and struck Mrs. Hodges on her left wrist and side. Never before in history had there been a documented instance of a meteorite striking a human being. Mrs. Hodges was hospitalized soon afterward—not so much because of her injuries, which weren't serious, as because of the enormous public response to news of the event, which brought traffic-jam throngs of curious people to the Hodgeses' house. The U.S. Air Force showed up, too, and spirited the meteorite away for study; this was the era of the Red Scare and the rumors of a wrecked spaceship in New Mexico. Mrs. Hodges, a shy, overweight woman known as Ann, soon suffered a minor collapse from all the to-do.

Mr. and Mrs. Hodges hoped at least to get some financial reward for their trouble. Unfortunately, they were only renters of the house they lived in. Mrs. Birdie Guy, the house's owner, who was up on the law, announced to the press, correctly, that the meteorite was legally hers. After the Air Force returned the meteorite without finding in it any evidence of Russians or space aliens, Mrs. Guy sued the Hodgeses for possession. The parties eventually settled out of court, when the Hodgeses bought the meteorite from Mrs. Guy for five hundred dollars. The big-spender meteorite collectors whom the Hodgeses had been counting on never materialized, and finally the couple donated the meteorite to the natural-history museum of the University of Alabama, where today it is the main exhibit that visitors come from out of state to see.

The Hodgeses later divorced. Ann's life did not turn out happily, and the only human ever known to be hit by a meteorite died, after a series of illnesses, at the age of fifty-two. Possibly, the unfairness of having to pay her landlady for the meteorite that hit her had upset her view of life. As the law is now, if you are hit and killed by a meteorite and you happen to be on property not your own, your heirs have no legal claim to the object that ended your life. Of course, even with the world's expanding population the chances of this happening remain small.

In any event, Srini Nageswaran took his responsibilities of ownership seriously. After the first press releases about the object, when his phone began ringing constantly with calls from reporters and meteorite collectors and interested institutions and friends, he chose a careful approach, allowing just one camera crew to film inside his house, and letting the stories disseminate from that coverage only. He didn't want too much turmoil to overwhelm his seven-year-old son, whom he sometimes refers to as "the little one."

A few weeks after the media interest died down, I gave Srini a call, and he kindly invited me to stop by. Srini is a quiet, self-possessed man of forty-six with a depth of expression in his dark-brown eyes and a gently precise manner. He wore a sweater of a subdued shade, bluejeans without fading or wrinkles, and no shoes, just socks. He asked me to take my shoes off in the foyer, and we sat in a living room that was so carefully furnished and well kept that it could have been the living room in the development's model home. Srini grew up in the city of Chennai, in southern India, and his family came to the U.S. in 1997. He has family in Chennai still, and relatives in Hong Kong and the U.K. and California, and friends in Kuwait and Japan. Many of them had got in touch with him after his name was in the news. He said that, all in all, being hit by a meteorite had been a nice experience so far.

Naturally, I wanted to see the famous bathroom. Srini led me up the stairs and through a bedroom with a large double bed and portrait photographs of family members on the walls. The bathroom door opened off the bedroom's back left-hand corner. We stepped into it tentatively, as if entering a shrine. In the ceiling the hole gaped, black and raw-looking. I had seen photos of the damage, but what they hadn't made clear, or I hadn't noticed, was the skylight in the bathroom ceiling just a few inches to the left of the hole. There was nothing in the view through the skylight except the blue beyond, but I stared into it intently. I imagined a dotted line extending from the shattered tile on the floor and through the hole, out the roof, across the blank blue vista in the skylight, and onward and outward, incalculably far.

We stood for a while in the charged astronomical presence, then went back downstairs. I asked Srini what his plans for the object were now. He said he hoped eventually to sell it to a museum that would display it to the public, especially schoolchildren. "It didn't travel so many millions of miles for nothing, just to sit here and rest," he said. He said he had decided to have it tested soon, so as to remove all doubt. The idea of cutting it made him uncomfortable because of the danger of damaging the object's integrity and decreasing its value. Still, he thought that was the way to go.

As it happened, in a couple of months a new test became available that didn't require cutting at all. The American Museum of Natural History had just acquired a sophisticated device called a variable-pressure scanning electron microscope, the latest improvement in that technology. Electron microscopes can determine the chemical composition of a substance by beaming electrons at it. The electrons excite electrons in the chemical elements in the substance, causing them to emit X rays that the microscope then reads. Every element gives its own distinct X-ray signature. Variable-pressure scanning electron microscopes have a sample chamber large enough to hold the Nageswarans' object. When Jeremy Delaney described this microscope to Srini, its non-invasiveness appealed to him.

On April 27th, Srini retrieved his object from the safe-deposit box where he'd been keeping it and drove to the museum, accompanied by his son. Den-

"Hold on—I think you got my toast."

• •

ton Ebel, the curator of the meteorite collection, met them when they arrived, showed them around, and explained the microscope and what it was going to do. He introduced them to Joe Boesenberg, a senior scientific assistant at the museum, who was about to get his Ph.D. at Rutgers, and other museum staff. Then Ebel, Boesenberg, and colleagues took the object and studied it in the microscope for half an hour or forty-five minutes.

As soon as they finished, they told Srini and his son their findings. The object, Joe Boesenberg said, contained no nickel. It did contain a small percentage of chromium and manganese, because it was in fact an alloy, high-chromium steel, which is a type of stainless steel. High-chromium stainless steel is produced not in space but in factories. The absence of nickel would be decisive in itself; all iron meteorites contain nickel. In short, the Nageswarans' object was not a meteorite.

"I got a call from Joe Boesenberg," Jeremy Delaney told me afterward. "He said, 'Jerry—no nickel.' I said, 'Ooh, boy.' It sure looked like a meteorite, and it sure fooled me, that sneaky little devil. Well, if you keep on studying these objects, over time you'll see far fewer meteorites than meteor wrongs."

Remembering the doubter, Gary Weinstein, from the one-day display at Rutgers, I reached him at Gary's Gem Garden and asked if he'd heard the latest. "Yeah—how 'bout that?" he said. "That thing just didn't look normal to me. It had those straight, like, hash marks on the surface going every direction. I'd never seen that in any meteorite before. And there was the absence of fusion crust, and especially the very atypical regmaglypts—those are the thumb-shaped indentations that meteorites get when they come through the atmosphere.

"Plus," he said, "there were those objects that came down out West just two days after this object hit. Over Denver at about six-forty-five in the morning on January 4th, all these amazing streaks were seen in the sky. A traffic copter took some good videos of it. Turned out it was a Russian rocket that had launched a French satellite back in December. Nobody knows where the wreckage landed—maybe in the New Mexican desert, maybe it kept going all the way to the ocean—but it was definitely Russian space junk, confirmed by tracking. That just seemed like too much of a coincidence to me."

After I hung up, I called Jeremy Delaney back and asked what he thought of the Russian-space-junk theory. "I suppose it's plausible," he said. "In the American space program, we generally use titanium, not steel, for parts that have to be really strong. Titanium is hard to work with, though, so maybe other countries' space programs consider chromium steel an acceptable substitute. I *am* inclined to think that the object is an orbital fragment of some kind, and not something that fell off an airplane. We've done calculations based on the damage at the Nageswarans', and I believe only an object falling from orbit would have the likely velocities. But the object itself is a very common type of steel, of a composition so nondescript that its origin would be difficult to pursue, and I don't know if Srini would have the time or money or inclination to pursue it. In the end, we'll probably never know exactly where the object came from.

"When I tell people about this event, or series of events, I always put in a plug for science," he continued. "Scientists admit mistakes—no other profession or calling does that anymore, it seems. Scientists not only can be wrong but can be shown to be wrong very publicly. You examine evidence, you put together a hypothesis that seems the most likely, or least wrong. Then the tests come back and say, 'Sorry, guys.' This time I got to be the one who says, 'Oops—I was wrong.' "

When I caught up with Srini a few weeks after the test at the museum, he sounded down. "We're not sure what the object is, but it is not a meteorite, no," he said quietly. "We have to accept this and move on. The experience has been educational. My son was very excited to meet the scientists, and soon after the meteorite—I mean, the object—hit our house, my son and I went to a rocks and minerals show, and he began a rock collection. And he enjoyed going to the museum and seeing the microscope. So this has been absolutely good for him."

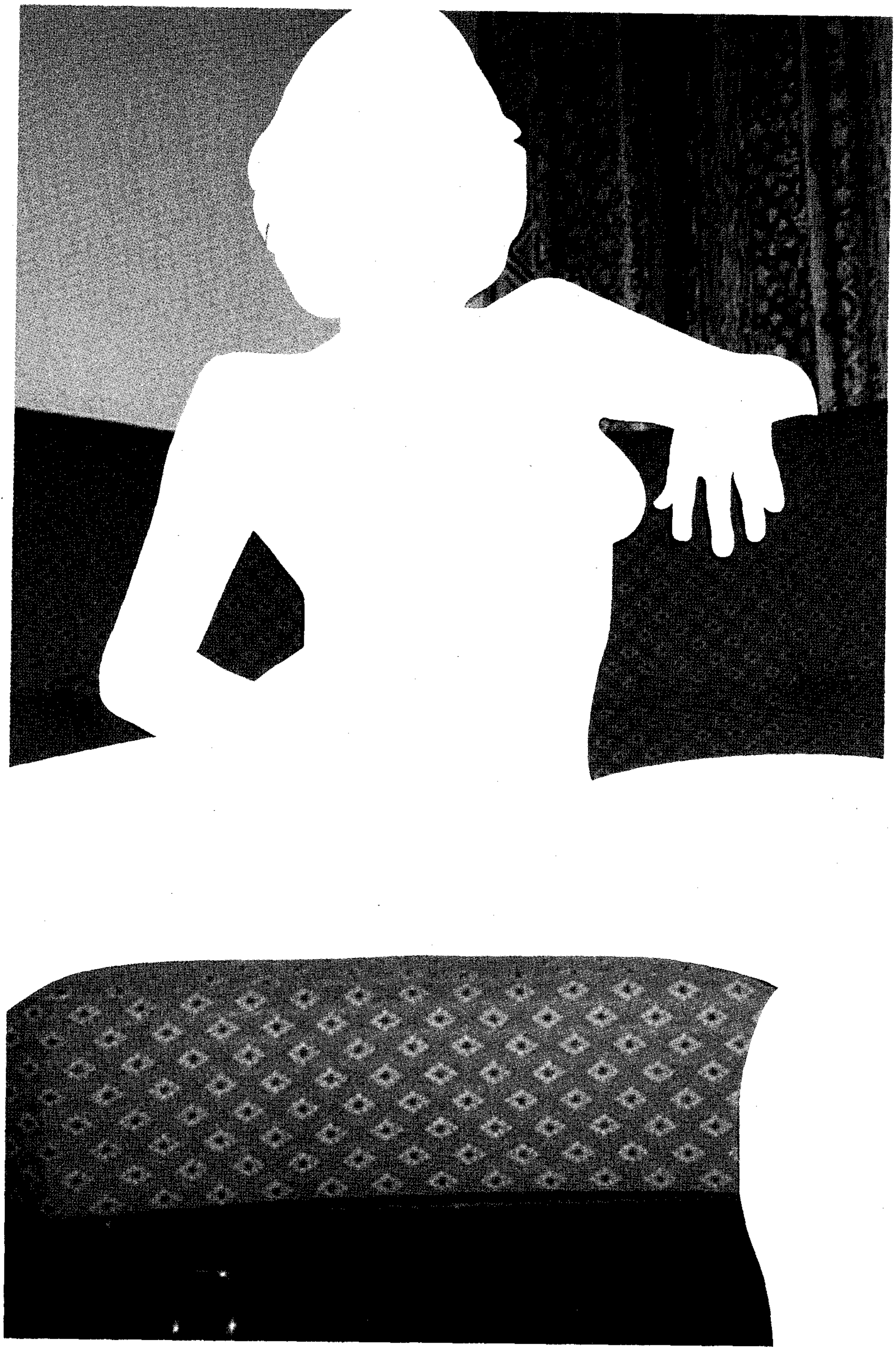
"Maybe because of this your son will grow up to be a scientist," I said.

For the first time in the conversation, Srini laughed. "Yes, definitely—that would be a very good outcome," he said. "I see that he has the aptitude." ♦

FICTION

IF I VANISHED

BY STUART DYBEK



"What if I were to vanish?"

"Vanish? Under what circumstances?"

"It doesn't matter."

"You mean, like—*poof!*—suddenly you're not there?"

"I'm not there."

"But there's always a reason, or at least a context. Were you kidnapped? Abducted by aliens? An extraordinary rendition by the C.I.A.? Did you fall down a rabbit hole? Was it amnesia? Vanishing cream? Did you meet someone else? Was there a note? A message on my answering machine saying, ' "Goodbye" 's too good a word, babe, don't worry, *ciao*'? Should I show up at the Department of Missing Persons? Or by 'vanish' do you mean that all trace of you would be wiped from my memory?"

"Say I met someone else."

"Well, see, that's a different question."

"You don't have to answer that one. I can see the answer in your eyes. They're more honest than you are."

"Where'd you come up with this?"

"I heard it in a movie."

"What movie? Certainly not 'The Vanishing.' "

"It was a Western."

"Clint Eastwood? Duke Wayne? Roy Rogers?"

"Kevin Costner."

"Costner a cowboy? Pauline Kael said in her review of 'Dances with Wolves' that Kevin Costner had feathers not only in his hair but in his head."

"It wasn't Kevin Costner per se. It was Charley something, the character Kevin Costner plays, who gets asked the question—by Annette Bening."

"No, it wasn't Charley something. Characters in American movies are just poor excuses to watch movie stars. Can you remember the name of any of the characters Marilyn Monroe played? They're all Marilyn Monroe. Charlton Heston isn't Moses, Moses is Charlton Heston."

"Answer the question."

"First, you have to tell me if you want me to answer it as if we're starring in some movie. If we're in an Ingmar Bergman film, then the answer's going to be different than if we're in something by Paul Verhoeven, say."

"You're stalling."

CHARLES COHEN, "PIC_071"(2001)/BONNI BENRUBI GALLERY

"Because a question about vanishing is easy to answer in a movie where the good guys always win. I mean, if we were in a Western I reckon I'd say, 'If you vanished, Ma'am, I'd mount my horse and ride after you to the ends of the earth. I'd ride to the silver mountains of the moon and back, gunning down Injuns and other swarthy Third World desperadoes until I found you again.' "

"In other words, you'd make fun of me."

"I'm making fun of cowboy kitsch, of the Marlboro Man mythos of the genocidal, racist, anti-environmental, *Heil* Adolph Coors's right-wing all-American West."

"No, you're making fun of me. And you're wrong, by the way. In the movie, he doesn't answer anything like that. He doesn't answer at all right away. He goes off to think about it, like you could have done, and he comes back with the answer."

"O.K., I give. Tell me the *right* answer."

"You want to know, go see the movie."

He doesn't see the movie until two years later, after she has vanished. Clearly, by "vanish" she hadn't meant that she'd be wiped from his memory.

Jack doesn't remember the title, if he ever knew it, but, one night, unable to concentrate on any book in the house, he Googles "Western Costner Bening," and finds fifty thousand five hundred entries for a film called "Open Range." Kevin Costner not only stars in it; he also directed it.

According to the reviews that Jack skims, it's a movie about the war between free grazers and landowners. The free grazers—Costner as the former gunslinger Charley Waite, and Robert Duvall as Boss Spearman—are the good guys. The evil rancher who controls the law is played by Michael Gambon. Their economic clash is a moral contest: greedy corporate America versus the don't-fence-me-in values of the Old West. The conflict plays out against what many reviewers agree is a beautifully photographed "iconic vista"—Montana, 1882, a big-sky landscape that makes it look as if there were enough to go around for everyone, especially since the *original* free-grazing tribes have been decimated. The film was actually shot in Alberta.

Reviews compare "Open Range" to classics like "High Noon." Amateurs at Amazon rate it a four-star masterpiece. The Cleveland *Sun News*, where dollar signs, rather than stars, are awarded, agrees: 4 ½ $. It's a "Hot Pick," "a paean to the Old West," for Boo Allen, of the Denton *Record-Chronicle*, and four and a half stars for Roger Ebert, who praises its defense of the values of a vanishing life style.

The phrase "vanishing life style" catches Jack's attention. He wonders if vanishing is a motif in the movie, a theme echoed in the love story between Costner and Bening, prompting the odd question: What if I were to vanish?

Other reviews are less enthusiastic. The movie's panned in the New York *Times*, the Chicago *Tribune*. *Rolling Stone* despises its "insufferable nobility," and *Newsday* complains of "the man's-gotta-do-what-a-man's-gotta-do excesses" of the script. A couple of reviewers find that it mirrors Bush's cowboy Presidency, with his bring-it-on war on terror and "Wanted Dead or Alive" rhetoric. It makes a Worst Movies of the Year list: "a Harlequin Romance with a gunfight at the O.K. Corral."

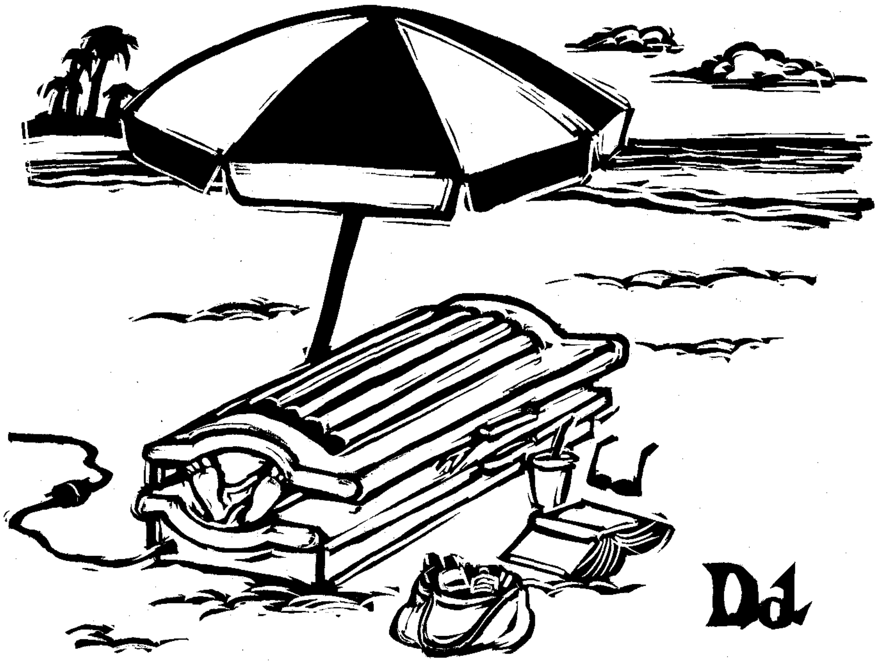
From the little that Ceil said, Jack had assumed that the movie was a love story, but the reviews mostly agree that Costner's relationship with Bening seems superfluous. Bening plays Sue Barlow with what is described on Yahoo! UK as "the steely resolve" of "a spinster who has nearly given up on love." Iggy's Movie Reviews cautions, "The ties that bind these two lonely folks are . . . flimsy. Unless Sue placed a personal ad seeking a SWM, age 40-50, who loves dogs, cares about friends and has killed before and will kill again, the attraction between the two doesn't make a lot of sense."

Jack decides to see for himself. Whatever the answer to the question about vanishing, Ceil must have experienced a shock of recognition at something in the film. Tonight, his missing her has assumed the guise of curiosity, and curiosity is preferable to feeling her absence. It's late, already after eleven-thirty, but he knows a Blockbuster nearby that's open until midnight.

The street has vanished, been whited out. He was so absorbed in cyberspace, he hadn't noticed. It seems to Jack that the snowfall should have a hiss of its own, something other than the swish of tires from the Dunkin' Donuts-lit cross street at the end of the block. If it were true that Eskimos have a hundred words for snow, there'd be a word meaning snow-that-makes-the-familiar-unrecognizable. Jack can't tell which of the plastered shapes lining the curb is his Saab. He imagines having to go car by car, brushing off snow to find his, and, when he realizes that he might not make it to Blockbuster in time, the intensity of his disappointment surprises him. Then he spots his car, dim under the only street light that has burned out. Rather than take the time to scrape the windows, he scoops the snow with his bare hands. When the engine turns over, the radio plays. He flicks on the defroster, the wipers, the headlights. It takes only that time for him to recognize the piano version of Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition," the movement titled "Gnomus," which is meant to evoke the picture of a nutcracker in the shape of a gnome promenading on deformed legs. Jack practiced this piece for a whole semester in college when he still studied piano. He hasn't heard "Pictures" in years, and it occurs to him that sometimes one stops listening to a beloved masterpiece in order to continue to love it. Perhaps the pianist now is Sviatoslav Richter, at the legendary live recital. Jack remembers reading that after Richter's possessed performance the Steinway he'd used had to be junked. He doesn't wait for the engine to warm.

The snow-paved Blockbuster lot is empty and Jack leaves the car running, wipers swiping, radio broadcasting the movement titled "Catacombae," which echoes the spectral world beneath the streets of Paris. Ghosts seem to swirl across the deserted streets of Jack's city as well. He rushes in and a white kid with rusty dreadlocks shoots him a dirty look from behind the counter, before directing him to the Action section. It only now occurs to Jack that the movie might be checked out, and he scans the rack feeling ridiculously frantic. He's in luck—it's there next to Steven Seagal's "On Deadly Ground" and "Once Upon a Time in Mexico."

"Open Range" in hand, Jack opens the car door onto a blasting heater and the majesty of the final movement, "The Great Gate of Kiev." With no more reason to hurry, he silences the heater and sits in the idling car, watching his tire tracks be obliterated by the snow gathering as it might in Kiev. The yellow Blockbuster sign subtracts itself from the night. Beneath the blurred street lights, ascending notes and falling flakes create the impression of a gossamer arch spanning Chicago Avenue. Jack slips the Saab into gear and drives slowly toward the gate of snow that retreats before his headlights. It's a vision more imagined than hallucinated, and it makes Jack think how long it's been since he was stoned for real. Not since a vacation when Ceil wanted to see what sex would be like on hashish. Instead of smoking it, they mixed it with honey and spices, based on a recipe for a sweetmeat supposedly served by Alice B. Toklas at Gertrude Stein's soirées. That night ended in an emergency room, Ceil faint, terrified, hallucinating. She later said she'd had an out-of-body experience and seen herself dead. "Keep talking to her," the doctor had told Jack. "Don't let her slip away." It's not a scene that he wants to recall.



He thinks instead of the first time he heard "Pictures at an Exhibition." His best friend in high school, Rafael Rio, a self-proclaimed graffiti artist, had stolen a Lincoln so they could drive to Detroit to see the murals that Diego Rivera had done for Edsel Ford. High, joyriding after midnight, they'd cruised onto the Chicago Skyway, the city aglow beneath them. Jack had punched on the tape deck, and when the orchestral version of "Pictures at an Exhibition" blared out they began conducting wildly—not that either of them knew what was playing, but they knew that it was something.

Jack turns off the radio, and makes a left into the Dunkin' Donuts that has lit the end of his block for the three years he's lived in the neighborhood. He's never had the urge to stop there before. Ceil claimed they had good coffee. If he's going to do something so peculiar as to stay up late watching a film that more than one critic complained was, at a hundred and thirty-five minutes, too long, a coffee is in order. He doesn't want to drowse off and miss the answer to Bening's question.

A woman with lapis-lidded sleepy eyes, a gold-studded nostril, and a caste mark that looks like misapplied nail polish glances up expectantly when he enters. Her face appears to be disfigured by a mole on her cheek, but as he approaches the counter Jack realizes that the mole is the microphone of her headset. "The usual?" she asks.

He isn't sure whether the question is addressed to someone she's speaking with through the headset or to him. She smiles, waiting for an answer.

"Depends on what's usual," Jack says.

In the hygienically bright lighting, the trays of frosted doughnuts look like replicas. He notices a surveillance camera and has a tactile sensation of being filmed. It's as if he'd stepped into a scene of infinitely repeated takes.

"Sorry, I thought you were someone else," she says. Her singsong accent would be perfectly in character if she were playing an Indian woman who works nights at a Dunkin' Donuts. "He always has a small black coffee and a Bavarian Kreme."

"Good by me," Jack says. He's impatient to step back out into the hypnotic night, but the woman takes her time selecting a doughnut, artfully creasing the bag, then fitting with inordinate care the lid on the coffee cup, which reads "America Runs on Dunkin'."

"Two-eighty-two," she says, and, when Jack digs into his jeans pocket, she adds, "He always gives me a fiver. Tells me, 'Keep the change, doughnut girl.' "

"Maybe that handsome guy you thought was me will come by later," Jack says, handing her a five.

"No," she says. "No cabs tonight."

"He takes a cab here?"

"*Drives* a cab. He's never come in, just goes through drive-through. He always jokes that I'm the most beautiful woman in the doughnut shop."

"Keep it," Jack says, and she stuffs the change into a Styrofoam tip cup on the counter. He doesn't call her doughnut girl. Their conversation feels scripted enough already. It was a mistake to stop here. Not only has the spell of what had come to seem like a quest been broken but a night that had felt spontaneous now seems manufactured. The snow is real, Jack thinks, and the music.

"I told him it was my last night working here," she says. "I just wanted to say goodbye."

Ceil was right about the coffee—strong with a hint of licorice—but the cab-driving double, whoever he is, doesn't share Jack's taste in doughnuts.

Jack crushes the bag with the half-eaten Bavarian Kreme inside and lobs it into a wastebasket. He moves his laptop from the bedroom that serves as an office to an end table in the living room, inserts the DVD, and turns off the only lamp burning in his apartment. He tries to imagine Ceil alone in a dark movie theatre years earlier, gazing at a panoramic screen that properly conveyed the big-sky landscape. Or maybe she saw the film on a little seat-back screen, during a flight from London or Brussels. Back then, if she wasn't travelling for her work with a human-rights organization, they'd spend every weekend together. It surprises him that he never asked her where she'd seen the movie. He's watching it now to see it through her eyes.

From its early scenes on, "Open Range" is a love story between cowboys. Driving longhorns before him, a grizzled Robert Duvall gallops across the landscape. One of the cowpokes remarks, "Old Boss sure can cowboy, can't he?," and Costner answers, "Yeah, broke the mold after him." As the reviewers noted, the film's dialogue is a rehash of other Westerns. Usually, Jack avoids reading reviews beforehand, so as not to ruin any surprises, but there aren't any surprises in "Open Range," unless its degree of sentimentality qualifies. Costner's Charley Waite has a cute mutt that follows him on the trail. Jack knows from the reviews that the dog is marked for death, but he'd have guessed it anyway. It brings to mind "Hondo," a movie Jack saw as a child, in which Apaches kill John Wayne's dog, Sam. Jack still remembers the dog's name. Despite all the people slaughtered in "Hondo," the only loss Jack really felt was the dog's. He wonders if a young Kevin Costner felt the same for Sam and never forgot the effect, both the loss and the justification of violence that went with it: clearly such savage dog-killers deserve extermination.

Annette Bening doesn't appear until partway through the film. When she does, Jack is suddenly, nervously alert. He listens for the question about vanishing to be posed in Bening's voice rather than in Ceil's. It's not a question for the early stages of a relationship, but Jack knows that the film has reached

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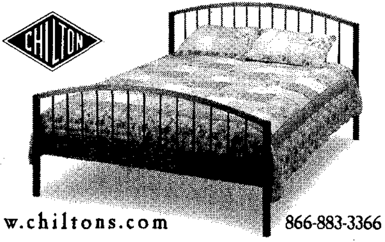
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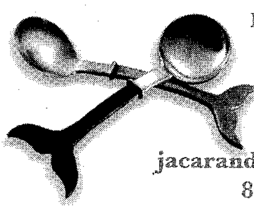
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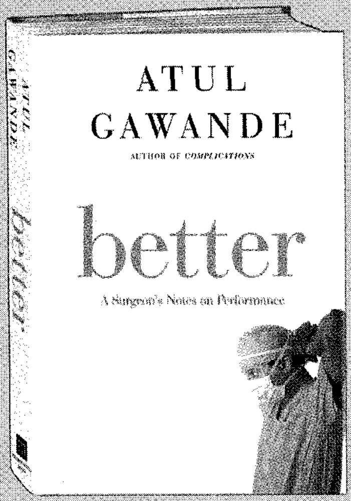

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do anything better."

—Michael Lewis, author of
"The Blind Side"

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and chaotic glory, and to
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the point when that question, and its answer, must be coming.

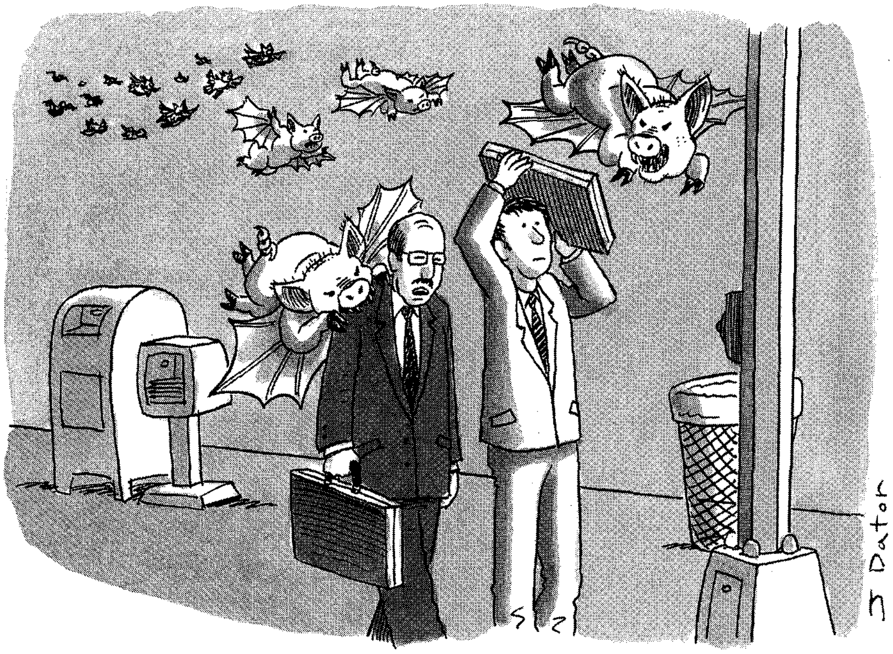
In an interview that Jack came across while scanning reviews, Costner mentioned that he thought Bening was "very heroic" for playing her character without makeup. It gives her a mature, sympathetic look that's fitting for the nurse she plays. Jack imagines that it's a look Ceil could identify with, as she, too, was heroic about makeup. But, then, Ceil's face was still unlined, except for a worry wrinkle across her forehead, visible when she wore her blond hair tied back. The corners of her eyes crinkled as if she were squinting against the wind when she smiled. Jack can visualize her pale-blue eyes but not her face. Ceil travelled regularly for work, and early in their relationship, when they didn't see each other for a couple of weeks, he'd tell her that he'd forgotten what she looked like. She'd pretend to be exasperated that he could forget so easily. He was kidding, but only in part: her face was so lovely to him that he hadn't yet allowed himself to gaze at her with the full force of recognition. That was true of her nakedness, too; it dazzled him, and he found he could take it in only in glimpses. He wonders now what else he didn't look at, what else he didn't see.

Jack doesn't have a photo of her. On the few occasions that they took pictures, it was Ceil who snapped them. He recalls her fiddling with a new digital camera as they walked out onto a wave-sloshed pier under bleaching blue sky. Ceil stopped before a small fish that looked as if a wave had flipped it onto the pier. Jack thought she was going to photograph it, but she gently slipped the fish back into the water. They'd gone only a step when an Asian man fishing from the pier turned and yelped, "Miss, you throw away my bait!" Ceil was annoyed when Jack laughed, but by the time they reached the end of the pier, where gulls swirled around a man cleaning salmon, they were both laughing. Ceil asked the man's daughter to take a picture of them. They didn't know then, smiling for the camera, that later that night, stoned on hashish, they'd end up in the emergency room. Jack asked for a copy of the picture taken on the pier, as he'd also asked for a picture of her for a present on his birthday. Ceil gave him instead an antique letter opener that she said would accrue in value. Ceil collected letter openers, pens, and paperweights, which she traded on eBay.

It was that night, after Jack had talked Ceil through her near-death experience in the E.R., that she told him about a long-distance affair she'd had before they met, with a man named Dom, who sold used Italian cars in upstate New York. The affair had lasted for years—she was vague about when they'd broken it off. Ceil still owned a Fiat Spider she'd bought with Dom at an auction; she said it was accruing value. Dom had photographed her naked so that during phone sex he could summon what she called "non-vanilla" poses—Dom had a thing for women and bottles. Ceil said that spreading for him had been the peak sexual experience of her life. It was as if she'd met a reflection of her own sexuality, a male twin to a secret self she'd always felt was dirty. Dom, she said, had made it clean. She said that their sexual likeness had overrideen all their differences, including his right-wing politics. After she and Dom broke up, Ceil had asked if she could visit him one last time, to watch while he deleted the private porn show he'd directed, but he refused, claiming that it would be too painful for him to see her again. He promised to erase the photos. Still, Ceil wasn't sure that they weren't somewhere in cyberspace, posted on one or another of the Web sites Dom frequented.

Listening to her, Jack understood how profoundly in love she'd been with the car salesman, and the authority that the relationship still had in her life. It brought to mind one of their first times in bed, when she'd called him "sir" in a little girl's voice and then apologized. He wondered, but didn't ask, what it had taken for her to break it off.

Tonight, he wonders if perhaps Ceil had been sleeping with them both. It would have been easy, given her frequent travel. He wonders if she could have been that devious, if, in fact, he was the catalyst she needed to end her relationship with Dom, if he'd been a player in a romance that she was directing, one he didn't know he had a part in. After Ceil told him about the photos, Jack had felt uncomfortable having to press



"That's what I hate about this city. You roast in summer, you freeze in winter, and the rest of the time it's carnivorous pig bats."

• •

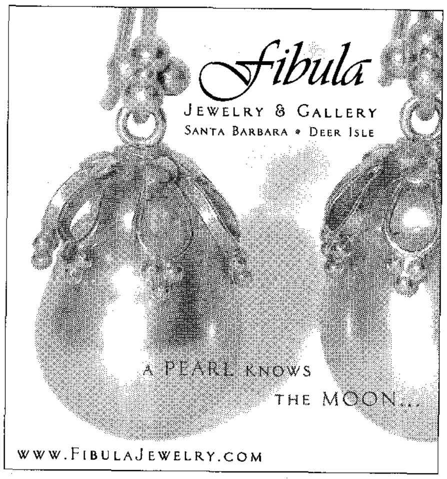
her for what was, in her word—or was it Dom's?—a simple "vanilla" photo, and he never brought it up again.

It's nearly 3 A.M. Costner and Bening have grown closer despite the lack of chemistry between them. As one reviewer remarked, "If the two of them were any more upstanding, they'd be trees." Though Bening still hasn't posed her question, she has revealed to Costner that she "always hoped somebody gentle and caring might come along." The nurse she plays has up to this point in the film abhorred violence, but when Costner replies, "Men are gonna get killed here today, Sue, and I'm gonna kill them, you understand that?," she submissively answers, "Yes." After the climactic shoot-'em-up, modelled on the gunfight at the O.K. Corral, in which the bad guys are wasted, Costner asks her again, "Those killings, they don't give you pause?"

"I'm not afraid of you, Charley," she answers. It's the moment in the film that reviews found least credible, given Bening's character. But Jack thinks that the film has finally got something right: Afraid? No, she's turned on, thrilled, ready to brag about her gunslinger. She just wants to get laid.

Jack wonders what Ceil, who regarded George Bush as a war criminal, would have said about Bening's response. Often the best part of going to a movie together was the time afterward, when they'd stop for a drink and discuss the film. Tonight, Jack has carried on a one-way conversation with Ceil, as if she were watching it beside him. These conversations with her have continued since she vanished. He wishes he could make them stop, but they're growing more frequent, as if the lengthening of her absence had made the phantom dialogue between them more compulsive.

Costner shyly asks Bening for a kiss. Killing is easy; it's smooching that's embarrassing. The film is winding down, the time for asking is running out. But she doesn't ask. Jack watches as they ride out of town together—Duvall, Costner, Bening—under the big sky. Jack listens for her question. She doesn't ask it. After all that killing in support of a man's right to the open range, Duvall says that he's tired of the open range. He'd like to run a saloon in town, and maybe Costner could be his partner. Costner tells Bening he'll be back. They exchange happily-ever-after smiles. She turns back toward town, and Costner and Duvall ride off toward the



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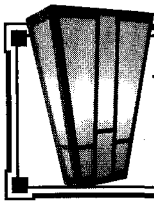

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dogies they've left on the open range.

Jack watches the credits roll.

He feels confused, then tricked. He has an impulse to replay the whole dull film. Could he have somehow missed the line? He vividly remembers that the conversation with Ceil was predicated on that question about vanishing. He knows that he didn't make it up. He can't understand why Ceil would have invented that dialogue, why she would have ascribed it and the answer that supposedly followed to a second-rate movie. There must have been some mistake. Could she have conflated "Open Range" with some other film? He remembers her complaining that she wasn't sleeping well; she used to wake beside him in the middle of the night from dreams that made her moan but dissolved before she could describe them. Maybe she had dreamed the question. It's another thing about her that he'll never understand. He ejects the DVD and logs off.

Are you sure you want to shut down your computer now?

The screen goes wordlessly blue, then blinks off, leaving the apartment lit only by the reflection of the street lights in the falling snow. The blank windowpanes are fogging from the bottom up. He isn't tired. Ceil was right about the coffee at Dunkin' Donuts. He tries again to summon her face. If the myth about a hundred words for snow were true, there'd be a word for snow-erasing-its-own-memory. He has an urge to open the window and let the wind and snow blow in. He tugs at the handles, hammers the sash, but the window won't budge. The cold pane mists with his breath and body heat, and, when he wipes away the steam, his reflection peeps in darkly. He wonders if a person can forget his own face. He wonders if his cabbie look-alike ever showed up for the usual. All the windows but one are dark in the apartment building across the way. Lines he hasn't thought about for years, from a poem in "Doctor Zhivago," come to mind:

> It snowed and snowed, the whole world
> over . . .
> A candle burned on the table;
> A candle burned.

It doesn't seem incongruous that the window across the way is lit not by the halo of a candle but by a bluish glow—someone watching television in the middle of the night or working at a computer, perhaps surfing Web sites. What if, in the vastness of cyberspace, whoever is up across the street should encounter an image of Ceil? Is it snowing the world over, even in New York, where the used-car salesman may still be at his computer, filing through a gallery of pictures of old girlfriends, like a collector checking the inventory of his antiquities, assessing the value they've accrued, before settling on a photo of Ceil?

Dom wasn't fond of travel, Ceil told Jack—it was one of their many differences. So every few weeks she'd made the trip to the river town outside the city where he had his dealership. She marvelled aloud about the thousands of miles she had logged over the years to be with him. Between visits, they'd talked on the phone at least once a day. They had broken up over the phone, and she said she'd thought that going to see Dom one last time in person would be the "classy" thing to do. Suppose Dom had allowed that journey.

Jack sees her travelling from Grand Central toward her beloved along a track she knows by heart. This time, Dom isn't waiting at the station. She takes a cab along a familiar cobbled street, past the candy shop and their breakfast café, past the antique shop where she foraged for letter openers, to a Victorian house, where clothes of hers still hang in the closet of the ornate master bedroom, where on a velvet chair the photographs she asks him to delete were taken. He's concealed them under the folder name "Bottles." She expects him to simply delete the files, but he opens them, and there they are, preserved in digital light: Dom—though he's not visible in the photo, she can see him—and herself, more real there than she feels at this moment, younger, naked, spreading her legs for the man she's chosen to define her. Remember that afternoon, Ceil? What's happened to us? We are halves of a whole. You said you knew it from the first time you saw me and had to leave because your body shook. You said I was the man you'd needed all your life to meet. What did you really come here for?

I need to be sure you've erased them.

But surely you know I could have hidden files and copies on disks and travel drives.

You wouldn't lie to my face.

Would you lie to me? Is there someone else? This horseshit about differences—as if they ever mattered to you with your clothes off. You're most devious to yourself. Do you think you'll ever be as intimate? If you leave, you'll always be lying. We'll be, for each other, an absence, like a phantom limb. You'll look for me in others and they'll feel what you're missing.

Erase them.

Say you love me. Say please.

I'll always love you. Please.

Please who?

Please, sir.

That's my girl. So, *poof!* Look, one gone. I was naked, too, remember? You think erasing a replica will erase reality? Will erase *us*? Will erase the me in you? Look, this one has always been my favorite. I've studied it a thousand times and still get hard. I'm going to close my eyes. You watch and tell me when you've disappeared. Like at those auctions you found so exciting: going . . . going . . . gone?

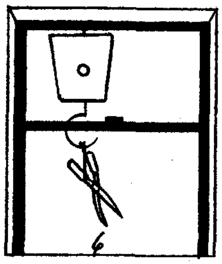
Yes, sir.

Satisfied?

Thank you, sir. Now please erase me from Trash.

"What would you do if I vanished?"

"You mean like—*poof!*—suddenly you're not there? So where are you? Lost in the ether? Travelling through time? In cyberspace?"



"It doesn't matter. Answer the question."

"O.K., I'll play. I'd ride to the ends of the earth, to the silver mountains of the moon. Or maybe they're borax."

"You think you'd find me there?"

"I'd follow your footprints across borax craters, ford molten rivers that parted like mercury, a starry sky guiding the way. Or on a summer day I'd walk out on a pier whose perspective jutted toward infinity, and when I reached its end, if you weren't there, over the laughter of gulls I'd call your name, and if you didn't answer I'd follow the little fish you saved and he'd lead me to you."

"He'd lead you to nowhere."

"Then, on a night in winter, I'd pass through the arch of a Great Gate of Snow and on the other side I'd be back in time in the city when it was ours. I'd hail the only cab out late. The cabbie would study me in the rearview, and in the mirror I'd see that his eyes were mine. I wouldn't have to tell him where to go. We'd drive from lighted corner to lighted corner for nights until I found the most beautiful woman in Dunkin' Donuts. The coffee's good here, you'd tell me."

"They do have good coffee, but I wouldn't be there."

"I'd hire a hypnotist who specialized in negotiating the release of alien abductees. I'd search the secret records for all the secret prisons of the C.I.A. I'd wait in long lines at the Department of Missing Persons . . ."

"That's not the answer."

"After a while, I'd do nothing but go day by day without you. Sometimes I'd remember something you said, and have another one-way conversation. I'd walk around secretly talking to you, wondering where you were and what you were doing. I'd tell myself that wherever you'd gone I wanted you to be happy."

"You need to work on a better answer."

"What was the question again anyway?"

"What would you do if I vanished?"

"But life is never that simple. One doesn't just vanish. There's always a why, or at least a context. You suddenly moved away in the middle of the night. Changed your unlisted phone number. Left no forwarding address so that mail was returned and e-mails disappeared into whatever graveyard file they go to. Was it amnesia? An overdose of vanishing cream? Did you meet someone else? Another catalyst? You're not the suicidal type, thank God, but still . . . or by 'vanish' could you really have thought that you'd be erased from my memory?"

"Say I met someone else."

"Well, see, that's a different question." ♦

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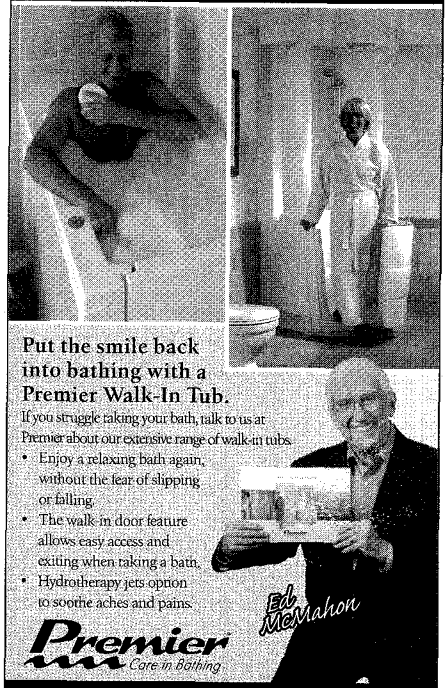

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THE CRITICS

BOOKS

FRACTURED FRANCHISE

Are the wrong people voting?

BY LOUIS MENAND

Why should anyone bother to vote? The chance that one vote will change the outcome of an election is virtually nil, and going to the polls involves a significant cost in time and opportunity. Presidential elections, in which more than a hundred million people vote, never turn on a single ballot. The lesson of the 2000 Presidential election was not "Your vote can make the difference"; it was more like "If you're taking the trouble to vote, at least fill in the ballot correctly." Yet many people do bother to vote. We praise these people, and we encourage nonvoting citizens to follow their example. We tend to feel that political participation is an unmixed good, a symptom of civic health and virtue.

Bryan Caplan, an economist who teaches at George Mason University, thinks that increasing voter participation is a bad thing. He thinks, in fact, that the present level of voter participation—about fifty per cent of the electorate votes in Presidential elections, a much lower percentage than in most democracies, as Americans are frequently reminded—is a bad thing. Caplan is the sort of economist (are there other sorts? there must be) who engages with the views of non-economists in the way a bulldozer would engage with a picket fence if a bulldozer could express glee. The cover illustration of his new book, "The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Politics" (Princeton; $29.95), shows a flock of sheep. This is meant to symbolize the voting public. It looks like a flock of cloned sheep, too.

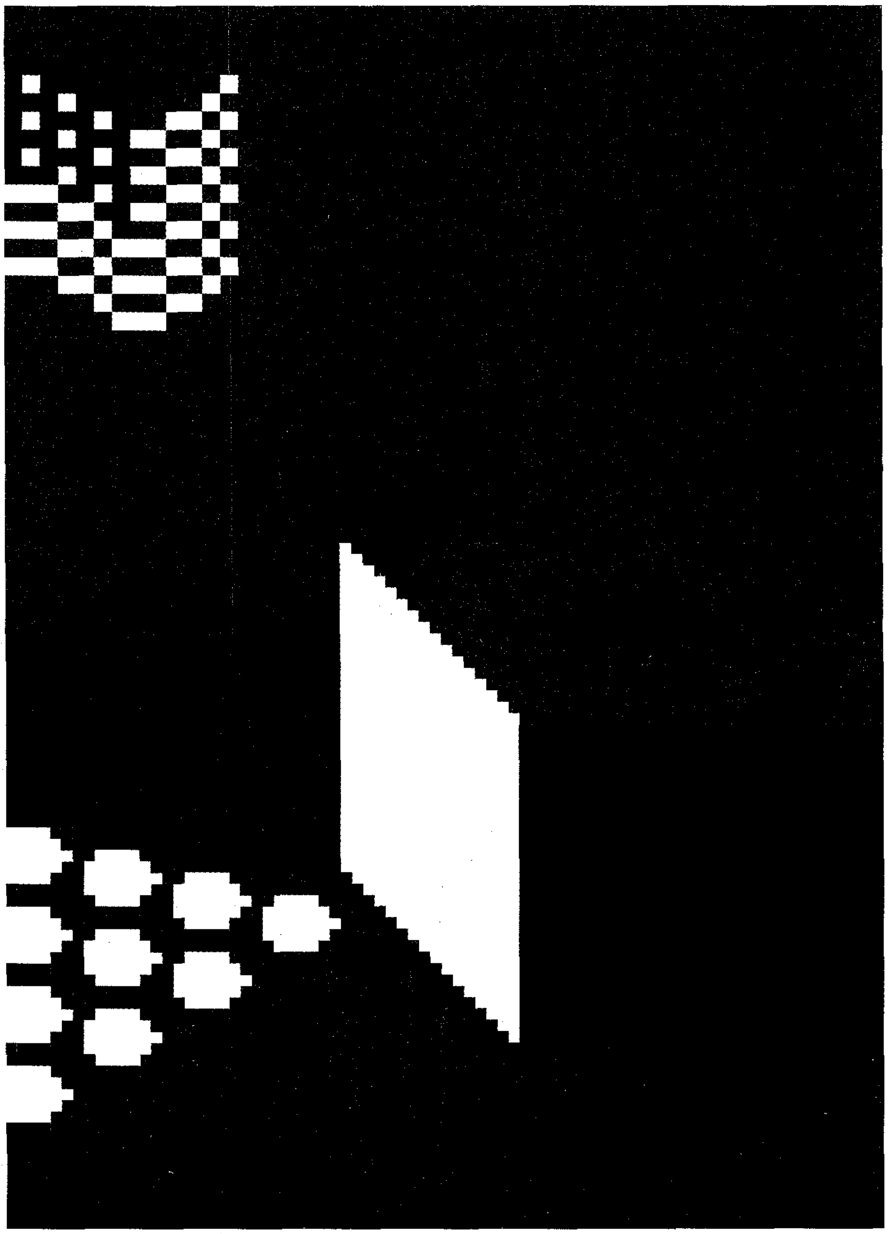
The average voter is not held in much esteem by economists and political scientists, and Caplan rehearses some of the reasons for this. The argument of his book, though, is that economists and political scientists have misunderstood the problem. They think that most voters are ignorant about political issues; Caplan thinks that most voters are *wrong* about the issues, which is a different matter, and that their wrong ideas lead to policies that make society as a whole worse off. We tend to assume that if the government enacts bad policies, it's because the system isn't working properly—and it isn't working properly because voters are poorly informed, or they're subject to demagoguery, or special interests thwart the public's interest. Caplan thinks that these conditions are endemic to democracy. They are not distortions of the process; they are what you would expect to find in a system designed to serve the wishes of the people. "Democracy fails," he says, "*because* it does what voters want." It is sometimes said that the best cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy. Caplan thinks that the best cure is less democracy. He doesn't quite say that the world ought to be run by economists, but he comes pretty close.

The political knowledge of the average voter has been tested repeatedly, and the scores are impressively low. In polls taken since 1945, a majority of Americans have been unable to name a single branch of government, define the terms "liberal" and "conservative," and explain what the Bill of Rights is. More than two-thirds have reported that they do not know the substance of Roe v. Wade and what the Food and Drug Administration does. Nearly half do not know that states have two senators and three-quarters do not know the length of a Senate term. More than fifty per cent of Americans cannot name their congressman; forty per cent cannot name either of their senators. Voters' notions of government spending are wildly distorted: the public believes that foreign aid consumes twenty-four per cent of the federal budget, for example, though it actually consumes about one per cent.

Even apart from ignorance of the basic facts, most people simply do not think politically. They cannot see, for example, that the opinion that taxes should be lower is incompatible with the opinion that there should be more government programs. Their grasp of terms such as "affirmative action" and "welfare" is perilously uncertain: if you ask people whether they favor spending more on welfare, most say no; if you ask whether they favor spending more on assistance to the poor, most say yes. And, over time, individuals give different answers to the same questions about their political opinions. People simply do not spend much time learning about political issues or thinking through their own positions. They may have opinions—if asked whether they are in favor of capital punishment or free-trade agreements, most people will give an answer—but the opinions are not based on information or derived from a coherent political philosophy. They are largely attitudinal and ad hoc.

For fifty years, it has been standard to explain voter ignorance in economic terms. Caplan cites Anthony Downs's "An Economic Theory of Democracy" (1957): "It is irrational to be politically well-informed because the low returns from data simply do not justify their cost in time and other resources." In other words, it isn't worth my while to spend time and energy acquiring information about candidates and issues, because my vote can't change the outcome. I would not buy a car or a house without doing due diligence, because I pay a price if I make the wrong choice. But if I had voted for the candidate I did not prefer in every Presidential election since I began voting, it would have made no difference to me (or to anyone else). It would have made no difference if I had not voted at all. This doesn't mean that I won't vote, or that, when I do vote, I won't care about the outcome. It only means that I have no incentive to learn more about the candidates or the issues, because the price of my ignorance is essentially zero. According to this economic model, people aren't ignorant about politics because they're stupid; they're ignorant because they're rational. If everyone doesn't vote, then the system doesn't work. But if *I* don't vote, the system works just fine. So I find more productive ways to spend my time.

Political scientists have proposed various theories aimed at salvaging some dignity for the democratic process. One is that elections are decided by the ten per cent or so of the electorate who are informed and have coherent political views. In this theory, the votes of the uninformed cancel each other out, since their choices are effectively random: they are flipping a coin. So candidates pitch their appeals to the informed voters, who decide on the merits, and this makes the outcome of an election politically meaningful. Another argument is that the average voter uses "shortcuts" to reach a decision about which candidate to vote for. The political party is an obvious shortcut: if you have decided that you prefer Democrats, you don't really need more information to cast your ballot. Shortcuts can take other forms as well: the comments of a co-worker or a relative with a reputation for political wisdom, or a news item or photograph (John Kerry windsurfing) that can be used to make a quick-and-dirty calculation about whether the candidate is someone you should support. (People argue about how valid these shortcuts are as substitutes for fuller information, of course.)


Many voters are ignorant of basic political facts, and most do not think politically.

TIBOR KÁRPÁTI

There is also the theory of what Caplan calls the Miracle of Aggregation. As James Surowiecki illustrates in "The Wisdom of Crowds" (2004), a large number of people with partial information and varying degrees of intelligence and expertise will collectively reach better or more accurate results than will a small number of like-minded, highly intelligent experts. Stock prices work this way, but so can many other things, such as determining the odds in sports gambling, guessing the number of jelly beans in a jar, and analyzing intelligence. An individual voter has limited amounts of information and political sense, but a hundred million voters, each with a different amount of information and political sense, will produce the "right" result. Then, there is the theory that people vote the same way that they act in the marketplace: they pursue their self-interest. In the market, selfish behavior conduces to the general good, and the same should be true for elections.

Caplan thinks that democracy as it is now practiced cannot be salvaged, and his position is based on a simple observation: "Democracy is a commons, not a market." A commons is an unregulated public resource—in the classic example, in Garrett Hardin's essay "The Tragedy of the Commons" (1968), it is literally a commons, a public pasture on which anyone may graze his cattle. It is in the interest of each herdsman to graze as many of his own cattle as he can, since the resource is free, but too many cattle will result in overgrazing and the destruction of the pasture. So the pursuit of individual self-interest leads to a loss for everyone. (The subject Hardin was addressing was population growth: someone may be concerned about overpopulation but still decide to have another child, since the cost to the individual of adding one more person to the planet is much less than the benefit of having the child.)

Caplan rejects the assumption that voters pay no attention to politics and have no real views. He thinks that voters do have views, and that they are, basically, prejudices. He calls these views "irrational," because, once they are translated into policy, they make everyone worse off. People not only hold irrational views, he thinks; they *like* their irrational views. In the language of economics, they have "demand for irrationality" curves: they will give up y amount of wealth in order to consume x amount of irrationality. Since voting carries no cost, people are free to be as irrational as they like. They can ignore the consequences, just as the herdsman can ignore the consequences of putting one more cow on the public pasture. "Voting is not a slight variation on shopping," as Caplan puts it. "Shoppers have incentives to be rational. Voters do not."

Caplan suspects that voters cherish irrational views on many issues, but he discusses only views relevant to economic policy. The average person, he says, has four biases about economics—four main areas in which he or she differs from the economic expert. The typical non-economist does not understand or appreciate the way markets work (and thus favors regulation and is suspicious of the profit motive), dislikes foreigners (and thus tends to be protectionist), equates prosperity with employment rather than with production (and thus overvalues the preservation of existing jobs), and usually thinks that economic conditions are getting worse (and thus favors government intervention in the economy). Economists know that these positions are irrational, because the average person actually benefits from market competition, which provides the best product at the lowest price; from free trade with other countries, which (for American consumers) usually lowers the cost of labor and thus the price of goods; and from technological change, which redistributes labor from less productive to more productive enterprises.

The economic biases of the non-economist form a secular world view that people cling to dogmatically, the way they once clung to their religious faith, Caplan thinks. People do not, he proposes, vote their self-interest: they are much more altruistic than the standard model, in which voters behave like shoppers, predicts. (This explains the phenomenon, puzzling to many social critics, of the auto worker who supports the elimination of the inheritance tax and the Hollywood producer who favors its retention.) "Precisely because people put personal interests aside when they enter the political arena," Caplan says, "intellectual errors readily blossom into foolish policies." People really believe that the country would be better off if profits were regulated, if foreign goods were taxed, and if companies were prevented from downsizing. Politicians who pander to these beliefs are more likely to be elected, and the special interests that lobby for protectionism and anticompetitive legislation are the beneficiaries—not the public. The result, over time, is a decline in the standard of living.

Caplan insists that he is not a market fundamentalist, but he does think that most economists peg the optimal level of government involvement in the economy too high, because they overestimate the virtues of democracy. He offers some suggestions for fixing the evils of universal democratic participation (though he does not spend much time elaborating on them, for reasons that may suggest themselves to you when you read them): require voters to pass a test for economic competence; give extra votes to people with greater economic literacy; reduce or eliminate efforts to increase voter turnout; require more economics courses in school, even if this means eliminating courses in other subjects, such as classics; teach people introductory economics without making the usual qualifications about the limits of market solutions. His general feeling is that if the country were run according to the beliefs of professional economists everyone would be better off. Short of that consummation, he favors whatever means are necessary to get everyone who votes to think like a professional economist. He wants to raise the price of voting.

It is not clear whether "The Myth of the Rational Voter" is intended merely to be provocative (a motive that has been known to get other economists in big trouble) or whether its recommendations for changing the rules for political participation are to be taken seriously (and by whom?). The book is, in part, a challenge to some of the assumptions made about voting behavior in the academic field known as public choice theory. Caplan has assembled a lot of data that reveal significant disparities between the average person's views on economic questions and the views of professional economists: the public thinks that the price of gasoline is too high, for instance, but most economists think it is about right or too low; the public thinks that most new jobs being created in the United States are low-paying, but economists disagree; the public thinks that top executives are overpaid, and economists do not. Caplan's point is that voters' views on the economy are not random, the result of "rational ignorance"; they reflect systematic biases caused by an erroneous understanding of the way economies work.

But, as Caplan certainly knows, though he does not give sufficient weight to it, the problem, if it is a problem, is more deeply rooted. It's not a matter of information, or the lack of it; it's a matter of psychology. Most people do not think politically, and they do not think like economists, either. People exaggerate the risk of loss; they like the status quo and tend to regard it as a norm; they overreact to sensational but unrepresentative information (the shark-attack phenomenon); they will pay extravagantly to punish cheaters, even when there is no benefit to themselves; and they often rank fairness and reciprocity ahead of self-interest. Most people, even if you explained to them what the economically rational choice was, would be reluctant to make it, because they value other things—in particular, they want to protect themselves from the downside of change. They would rather feel good about themselves than maximize (even legitimately) their profit, and they would rather not have more of something than run the risk, even if the risk is small by actuarial standards, of having significantly less.

People are less modern than the times in which they live, in other words, and the failure to comprehend this is what can make economists seem like happy bulldozers. "After technology throws people out of work, they have an incentive to find a new use for their talents," Caplan says, discussing the bias that non-economists have in favor of employment over productivity. "Downsizing superfluous workers leads them to search for more socially productive ways to apply their abilities." This process, he explains, is known as "churn." (Donald Trump: "You're churned!" Doesn't sound the same.) It's not hard to understand why the average person might contemplate job loss with less equanimity.

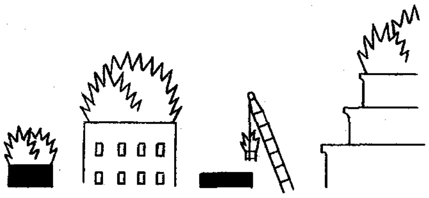
Negotiating the tension between "rational" policy choices and "irrational" preferences and anxieties—between the desirability of more productivity and the desire to preserve a way of life—is what democratic politics is all about. It is a messy negotiation. Having the franchise be universal makes it even messier. If all policy decisions were straightforward economic calculations, it might be simpler and better for everyone if only people who had a grasp of economics participated in the political process. But many policy decisions don't have an optimal answer. They involve values that are deeply contested: when life begins, whether liberty is more important than equality, how racial integration is best achieved (and what would count as genuine integration).

In the end, the group that loses these contests must abide by the outcome, must regard the wishes of the majority as legitimate. The only way it can be expected to do so is if it has been made to feel that it had a voice in the process, even if that voice is, in practical terms, symbolic. A great virtue of democratic polities is stability. The toleration of silly opinions is (to speak like an economist) a small price to pay for it. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Out Stealing Horses, *by Per Petterson, translated from the Norwegian by Anne Born (Graywolf; $22).* In this quiet but compelling novel, Trond Sander, a widower nearing seventy, moves to a bare house in remote eastern Norway, seeking the life of quiet contemplation that he has always longed for. A chance encounter with a neighbor—the brother, as it happens, of his childhood friend Jon—causes him to ruminate on the summer of 1948, the last he spent with his adored father, who abandoned the family soon afterward. Trond's recollections center on a single afternoon, when he and Jon set out to take some horses from a nearby farm; what began as an exhilarating adventure ended abruptly and traumatically in an act of unexpected cruelty. Petterson's spare and deliberate prose has astonishing force, and the narrative gains further power from the artful interplay of Trond's childhood and adult perspectives. Loss is conveyed with all the intensity of a boy's perception, but acquires new resonance in the brooding consciousness of the older man.

The Interloper, *by Antoine Wilson (Handsel; $13.95).* Owen, the narrator of this taut début novel, is a newlywed and a writer of software manuals—"a solid B," in his own estimation. This happy sense of stable mediocrity is demolished during his honeymoon, when his wife's brother is murdered, and she, in her grief, becomes emotionally distant. After the killer receives a lenient prison sentence, Owen, hoping to "unpoison the soil" of his marriage, contrives an intricate scheme to inflict what he considers appropriate psychological damage on the killer. He resolves to hide his efforts from his wife until the strategy succeeds—"like planning a surprise party"—at which point they can finally begin rebuilding their lives. But while his wife's grief begins to wane, Owen's obsession with his victim grows. It's clear from the start that Owen is doomed, but the queasy thrills of the novel derive from watching the scheme—and the marriage—unravel.



FDR, *by Jean Edward Smith (Random House; $35).* As Franklin Roosevelt approached the stage at the 1936 Democratic Convention, the steel braces on his useless legs and the support of his son's arm allowing him, in great pain, to simulate walking, he was jostled, and he crashed to the ground, scattering the pages of his speech. "Clean me up," he said, "and keep your feet off those damned sheets." Minutes later, utterly poised, he told an audience and a nation ravaged by the Depression that they had "a rendezvous with destiny." Smith, in this remarkable, sympathetic biography, doesn't flinch at Roosevelt's mistakes; the sections on the court-packing scheme and the internment of Japanese-Americans are painful to read. Smith also does a fine job with a complex marriage, avoiding the F.D.R. biographer's trap of being either annoyed or enraptured by Eleanor. The Roosevelt who emerges here—neither a stranger nor a painted icon—is flawed and magnificent.

A Mirror Garden, *by Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian and Zara Houshmand (Knopf; $25.95).* Born in Iran (then still Persia) in 1924, Farmanfarmaian grew up in a large mercantile family whose holdings included vast pistachio orchards outside the ancient city of Qazvin. Her graceful memoir maps an intrepid trajectory: a talent for drawing took her, as a young woman, to New York, where she landed a job as a fashion illustrator for Bonwit Teller, married badly, and entered the art world. A second marriage, to an Iranian aristocrat, brought her back to Iran, where she became an internationally recognized artist. She also set out to discover, collect, and, when necessary, repatriate Persian antiquities and folk art, though almost her entire collection was confiscated when the Shah fell.

BOOKS

THE INSURGENT

Garibaldi and his enemies.

BY TIM PARKS

Suddenly you are looking in his eyes. Officially, they're brown, but for you they'll always be blue. He is speaking in a soft, seductive voice. Glory if you follow, eternal shame if you don't. Rome or Death. In a moment, your destiny shifts. Incredibly, you have volunteered. You are given a red shirt, an obsolete rifle, a bayonet. You are taught to sing a hymn full of antique rhetoric recalling a magnificent past, foreseeing a triumphant future. You learn to march at night in any weather and over the most rugged terrain, to sleep on the bare ground, to forgo regular meals, to charge under fire at disciplined men in uniform. You learn to kill with your bayonet. You see your friends killed. You grow familiar with the shrieks of the wounded, the stench of corpses. If you turn tail in battle, you will be shot. Those are his orders. If you loot, you will be shot. You write enthusiastic letters home. You have discovered patriotism and comradeship. You have been welcomed by cheering crowds, kissed by admiring young women. Italy will be restored to greatness. From Sicily to the Alps, your country will be free. Then, with no warning, it's over. A politician has not kept faith. An armistice has been signed. Your leader is furious. You hardly understand. Rome is still a dream. Your group disbanded, you receive nothing: no money, no respect, no help in finding work. But, years later, when he calls again, you go. You will follow him to your death.

Such was the experience of many thousands of Italians who volunteered to fight with the insurgent, adventurer, and patriot Giuseppe Garibaldi in the series of uprisings, battles, and full-scale wars that finally, in 1861, brought about a unified and independent Italy. The long and mountainous peninsula had been broken up into a dozen and more states after the collapse of the western Roman Empire, in the fifth century. Through the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, these had at least been run by Italians, but, around the year 1500, French, Spanish, and, later, Austrian armies moved in to install client monarchs on Italian thrones and, in some cases, to annex territory directly.

Briefly united under Napoleon, the peninsula was divided again after his defeat, so that in 1816 there were actually eight separate "Italian" states. By far the largest and most depressingly backward of these was the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, which stretched from the furthest toe of the Italian boot north almost as far as Rome and was ruled by Bourbon kings originally imposed by Spain. In the northeast, the area from Venice to Milan was held by the Austrians, while to the west the only powerful Italian-run state, Piedmont, had its capital in Turin. In the center were four puny duchies.

But what really made the prospect of Italian unification problematic was a large area of land from Rome, on the Tyrrhenian Sea, across to the port of Ancona, on the Adriatic, and north as far as Bologna—the so-called Papal States. These territories were held and governed by the Pope, who was thus both a spiritual and a political ruler. Nationalist movements, of course, gain great impetus when they are allied to the religion of the people and able to insist on the divine right of their struggle. That could not happen in Italy. Any attempt to unite this most Catholic of countries would have to be achieved in opposition to Catholicism and to a Papacy whose territorial possessions were traditionally guaranteed by France, Austria, and Spain. This conflict between the interests of church and country vexed Italian public life through the Mussolini era and the Second World War. Even today, the Vatican is frequently accused of interference in the sovereignty of the Italian parliament.

By the eighteen-thirties, two very different forces had begun working to disturb the status quo and bring Italy together. On the one hand were the revolutionaries led by the tireless propagandist Giuseppe Mazzini, a Genoan who spent most of his life in exile in London. Fanatically republican and democratic, Mazzini set up a secret society, Young Italy, whose aim was to start popular insurrections all over the country, throw out existing political leaders, and set up a single, liberal progressive state. To join Young Italy meant accepting life as an outlaw and entering into direct conflict with the Catholic Church. It was the movement of a small, idealistic élite.

The Piedmontese monarchy, meanwhile, had begun to see the possibility of exploiting nascent Italian nationalism to unite the peninsula, or at least the area north of the Papal States, under its crown. This was self-aggrandizement in convenient and ambiguous alliance with patriotism.

Unfortunately, both projects were impractical. Every time Mazzini's revolutionaries started an uprising, they were rounded up and executed, more often than not by the Piedmontese authorities. The great majority of Italians were not interested in rebellion. And though the Piedmontese army was always capable of taking on a few republican hotheads, it was no match for the huge and disciplined forces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Milan, Venice, and the fertile northeastern plain remained unattainable.

More than anybody else, it was Giuseppe Garibaldi who eventually managed to get these two apparently irreconcilable forces, Piedmontese expansionism and progressive republicanism, to work together, however uneasily. And it was his capacity to inspire a quasi-religious fervor in his volunteers that allowed the unification movement, or the Risorgimento, as it became known, to overcome Catholic piety and loyalty to the Pope.

One of the most colorful figures in modern European history, Garibaldi is the subject of any number of biographies. For those who know little about his life and times, Lucy Riall's new book, "Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero" (Yale; $35), is not the place to start. Riall takes an iconoclastic line and assumes that the reader is entirely familiar with the icon she is targeting and the world that worshipped him. Those who would like to have the traditional picture before the dubious pleasures of seeing it deconstructed should read Denis Mack Smith's bland but efficient "Garibaldi: A Great Life in Brief" (1956) or, if they have time on their hands, George Macaulay Trevelyan's wonderful Garibaldi trilogy. Written in the first decade of the twentieth century, Trevelyan's work remains in print, because, for all its pro-Garibaldi bias, it is still the best.

By any account, Garibaldi's was an extraordinary life. Born in Nice in 1807, he was a sailor at sixteen and a sea captain at twenty-five. Thus far, he was simply following in his father's and grandfather's footsteps: trading, fighting off pirates in the eastern Mediterranean, developing a cosmopolitan outlook. But in 1833 Garibaldi joined Mazzini's Young Italy. He soon became involved in a failed insurrection, was condemned to death in absentia by the Piedmontese judiciary, and fled to South America. Here he discovered a talent for guerrilla warfare, fighting first against the Brazilians for the breakaway republic of Rio Grande, then against the bullying Argentines for tiny Uruguay. He was wounded, jailed for a time, ran off with another man's eighteen-year-old wife, Anita (whom he eventually married), formed a brigade of Italian exiles, and, in 1846, fought a remarkable defensive battle against far superior forces at San Antonio del Salto, on the River Uruguay. Refusing all payment, he claimed to fight only for justice and freedom.

To unify Italy, Garibaldi had to inspire more fervent loyalty than even the Pope.

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Meanwhile, back in Europe, Mazzini had begun to promote Garibaldi's image, setting him up as the epitome of Italian patriotism and inviting him and his so-called "red shirts" to fight for a united and democratic Italian republic. After thirteen years of exile, Garibaldi hardly needed persuading and, in 1848, returned to Italy just as Europe was set alight by a series of liberal revolutions that began in Palermo and spread rapidly to Paris, Vienna, Naples, Turin, Milan, Florence, and Rome. At last, people seemed ready to fight. Sporting a poncho, flowing hair, and a gorgeous beard, Garibaldi joined Milanese revolutionaries who, in alliance with the Piedmontese army, were attempting to push the Austrians out of Lombardy. With a hastily collected group of volunteers, he won a skirmish or two around Lake Como before the Piedmontese army collapsed and he was forced to flee over the mountains to Switzerland.

Italy was in chaos. As Jonathan Keates recounts in his fine book "The Siege of Venice" (2005), the great wave of liberal and nationalist feeling that had prompted so many Italians to take up arms was everywhere undermined by competing agendas. Many of the rebel cities were spending more time arguing about an eventual form of government—federal or centralized, republican or monarchist—than preparing for the inevitable enemy counterattack. They seemed unable to agree on what sort of Italy they wanted or what sort was actually possible.

Desperate to get involved, Garibaldi headed for Tuscany, where he gathered a ragged brigade of irregulars and marched them aimlessly back and forth over the snowy heights of the Apennines before finally heading south to join Mazzini and other revolutionaries who had seized control of Rome. It was here that he first made his mark on European history. On April 30, 1849, his men turned back a far superior French

Army that had been sent to recover the city for the Pope. From that moment on, as Mack Smith points out, Europe was prepared for the idea that Rome might one day be an Italian rather than a papal city.

But, once isolated and under siege, Rome could not hold out long. Again, Garibaldi made a crucial decision. While other revolutionary leaders slipped out of the city on false passports, he rejected passage on an American naval vessel, and led four thousand volunteers into the hills to continue the struggle, promising them, in one of his most famous speeches, nothing but "heat and thirst by day, cold and hunger by night... exhausting vigils, extreme marches, and fighting at every step."

Pursued by Austrian and French forces, and accompanied by his pregnant wife, Anita, Garibaldi marched east and north across the Apennines in the hope of reaching revolutionaries who were still holding out, hundreds of miles away, in Venice. He travelled by night, taking the highest passes and following the most arduous paths. The men were constantly harassed by the enemy and hardly helped by the local population, and most of them deserted. Garibaldi disbanded the remaining group in neutral San Marino and headed on with a few faithful, only to lose Anita and her unborn baby to illness near the Adriatic coast. With barely time to bury her in a shallow grave, he retreated across the mountains to the Ligurian coast, where the Piedmontese authorities, nervous about French and Austrian reaction, forced him once more into exile. As much as anything, it was the combination of that one great victory against the French and then the odyssey back and forth across the mountains that raised Garibaldi's reputation in many Italian minds to the status of myth.

Depressed by defeat and the loss of his wife, Garibaldi crossed the Atlantic to New York, found work in a candle factory on Staten Island, then captained a merchant ship on a voyage to China and Australia, before returning to Italy, in 1854. When his brother died, he used a small legacy to buy himself part of the tiny and barely habitable island of Caprera, off Sardinia. This choice of home reinforced the sense of both his open-air virility and his determinedly independent spirit.

Garibaldi had now broken with Mazzini. The failures of '48 had suggested that any move toward unification must have a clear and practical project for running the country after the status quo had been overthrown. Given the strength of the Church and other conservative forces in Italy, a democratic republic was not feasible. So a group of ex-revolutionaries formed the National Society to promote a united Italy under the Piedmontese throne. Garibaldi, though staunchly republican, was one of the first signatories. Progressive political ideas, he decided, would have to wait until after unification. In the meantime, he placed his reputation and his military skill at the service of the Piedmontese king, Victor Emmanuel II, enlisting volunteers to fight beside regular forces whenever the opportunity arose. In the late eighteen-fifties, idealistic would-be fighters, most of them young, educated middle-class men, began to flock into Piedmont in the thousands.

It was an ambiguous situation. Victor Emmanuel and his Prime Minister, Camillo Cavour, were eager to have the support of Italian nationalists and to give the rest of Europe the impression that Risorgimento fever was unstoppable. On the other hand, they made sure that these men were not well armed, would not be decisive in battle, and would have no say in the running of Italy after unification. When, in 1859, a war was provoked in which Piedmont and France were lined up against Austria, Garibaldi was kept clear of the main battlefront, on the Lombard plain, and sent north to the lakes and mountains. There he won a series of impressive but minor victories before the French brought a sudden halt to the proceedings by making a separate treaty with the enemy. Piedmont did gain Lombardy and managed to annex the four small central-Italian duchies, but for the moment the unification process was stalled, leaving Garibaldi and other nationalists disappointed and angry.

All the same, Garibaldi's personal charisma had been amply confirmed. "When Garibaldi passed through a village," one local commissioner wrote, "you would not have said he was a general but the head of a new religion followed by a crowd of fanatics. The women, no less enthusiastic than the men, brought their babies to Garibaldi that he should bless and even baptize them.... Garibaldi would speak with that beautiful voice of his.... 'Come! He

HANDS

She peels cod fillets off the slab,
dips them in batter, drops them
one by one into the storm of hot fat.
I watch her scrubbed hands,
elegant at the work,

and think of the hands of the midwife
stroking wet hair from my face as I sobbed and cursed,
calling me sweetheart and wheeling in more gas,
hauling out at last my slippery fish of a son.
He was all silence and milky blue. She took him away
and brought him back breathing,
wrapped in a white sheet. By then
I loved her like my own mother.

I stand here speechless in the steam and banter,
as she makes hospital corners of my hot paper parcel.

—*Jean Sprackland*

who stays at home is a coward. I promise you weariness, hardship and battles. But we will conquer or die.' They were not joyful words, but when they were heard the enthusiasm rose to its highest. It was delirium." According to the British military attaché George Cadogan, "He could make his followers go anywhere and do anything."

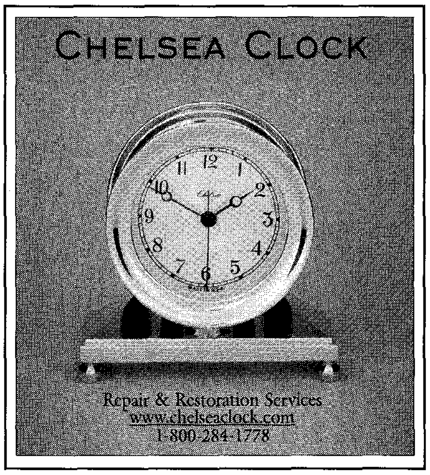
Back once again on Caprera, Garibaldi led a life that was a bizarre mixture of extreme frugality, severe rheumatism, celebrity, cigars, political conspiracy, and romantic complications. Although he had three surviving children by Anita, and a new baby by his maid in Caprera, he was in intimate correspondence with six women simultaneously, including the eighteen-year old Giuseppina Raimondi, whom he married on January 24, 1860, and renounced the same day, when he discovered that she was some months pregnant by one of his own officials. To add to his discomfort, he heard that his home town of Nice was to be handed over to the French in return for their participation in the war against Austria. Furious, Garibaldi got himself elected to the parliament in Turin, which he addressed in the most aggressive terms, but to no avail. So he was in an evil mood when, in April, he was invited to go and support a small uprising in Sicily. "Everything crushes and humiliates me," he wrote in a letter on April 25th. "I have only one remaining desire: *To Die for Italy;* and this destiny, these dangers I will risk earlier than I expected."

Garibaldi set sail for Sicily with a thousand volunteers on May 6th. "Italy and Victor Emmanuel!" was their battle cry. It was the turning point. In an astonishing series of engagements against the forces of the Bourbon King Francis II, Garibaldi consolidated a position in the northwest of the island, captured the city of Palermo, crossed the Strait of Messina to Reggio Calabria, pushed three hundred and fifty miles north to take Naples, then the largest town in Italy, and, finally, on September 30th, commanded an army of twenty-four thousand volunteers in a complex defensive battle against the regrouped and ever superior Neapolitan army south of the River Volturno. Despite defending a vulnerable front of more than twelve miles, he won.

At this point, the temptation was to head for Rome and destroy the temporal power of the Papacy for good. But the Piedmontese army had marched down from the north across the Papal States, declaring, with sublime hypocrisy, that this was the only way to protect Rome and the Pope from the "revolutionaries." The road to the Eternal City barred, Garibaldi chose to hand over all his territorial gains to the Piedmontese king, thus uniting Italy from north to south. Asking only a small pension in return, he withdrew to Caprera, where he went on to have three more illegitimate children with the governess of the first.

The surrender of the south, won by insurrection, to the north, captured by the Piedmontese army, was no doubt the moment of greatest tension among the heterogeneous forces that had been fighting to unite Italy. And Garibaldi was the man in the middle, with the power to decide between unity and civil war. The captains and advisers he had gathered around him in his many campaigns were republican by conviction and eager to capitalize on their victories. Garibaldi himself was reluctant to renounce the glory of taking Rome. He had introduced many liberal reforms in his brief dictatorship of the south and must have understood that they would be revoked under Victor Emmanuel. Both Mack Smith and Riall consider his unconditional surrender of all conquered territories a crushing political defeat, equal almost to the previous military successes. And yet the decision to hand over the south was inherent in the policy that Garibaldi had years earlier adopted, of supporting Italian unity under the Piedmontese crown. Nor was there any way to insure the enforcement of any liberal concessions extracted from the king as conditions for the handover. "If one must concede it is better to do so with good grace," he wrote to Mazzini.

It wasn't the end of his career. In 1861, he wore a red shirt, a white cloak, and a Spanish sombrero to complain to parliament about the government's disgraceful treatment of his volunteers, who had not been integrated into the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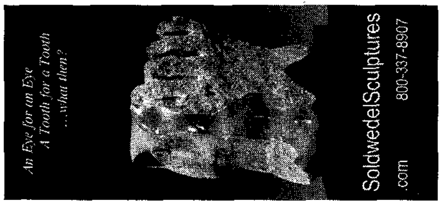
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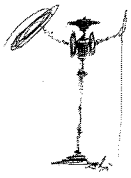
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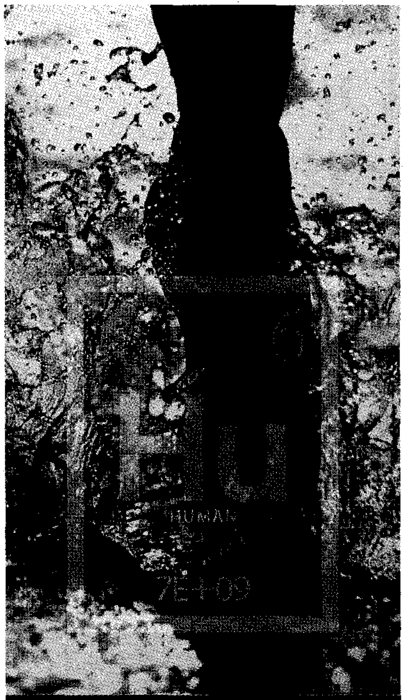

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national army. In 1864, he visited London and found half a million people lining the streets to cheer him. By now he was the most popular man in Europe. "Many of us [can] never forget the marvelous effect produced upon all minds" by Garibaldi, William Gladstone, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, declared.

In 1866, Garibaldi fought in another war to gain Venice and the Veneto from the Austrians and, in 1870, joined French republicans to fight in their war against Prussia. During the next decade, he led a campaign to protect Rome (now at last in Italian hands) from malaria by diverting the filthy Tiber away from the city center, completed a long memoir and three novels, and proclaimed the need for the emancipation of women, free education for all, independence of mind, the end of the Papacy, the end of war, the abolition of the death penalty, universal suffrage, a united democratic Europe, and various other unacceptable ideas. Before he died, in 1882, he ordered that his body be cremated on the beach in Caprera with "plenty of wood for the pyre." Cremation, which the Church regarded with abhorrence, was illegal, and these last wishes were not respected.

Such a full and intense life could not but be accompanied by rumor, adulation, denigration, and an endless stream of publications: press articles, pamphlets, hagiographies, attempts to appropriate Garibaldi's celebrity to this or that cause, to turn his adventures into myth and money. Nor could the interest end with his death. Many major Italian movements, Fascism and Communism included, claimed Garibaldi as their forebear, while the Italian state has always sought to present him, somewhat sanitized, as the essence of Italian patriotism.

Historians, meanwhile, have had to look hard to find something to criticize. Trevelyan concedes that he could be hotheaded and rash and perhaps was not politically astute. Mack Smith thought that his contempt for all organized religion was naïve, his temperament unstable, his clothes clownish, his belief in himself absurd. In 2005, Daniel Pick's "Rome or Death" had words of censure for the hero's treatment of his illegitimate daughter Anita. But the over-all verdict has invariably been favorable. "Garibaldi is like no one else," Georges Sand avowed in 1859. A century later, A. J. P. Taylor declared, "Garibaldi is the only wholly admirable figure in modern history."

In this sense, Lucy Riall's book is a major departure. Riall, a professor at the University of London, sets out to show that the man's reputation was actually the result of a "sophisticated propaganda exercise," which began with Mazzini's need to create a Risorgimento hero and was continued by Garibaldi himself, who became an able and determined manipulator of his own image. Rather than concentrating on his life and exploits, she examines the literature and the illustrations of the time to see which elements were adopted to popularize the hero and how this presentation was altered to suit different political developments and different audiences. To her, for example, the curious detail that Garibaldi enthusiasts often saw his brown eyes as blue suggests how published images of Garibaldi had supplanted the reality in people's minds.

As Riall pushes her hypothesis to the limit, Garibaldi emerges as a rather sinister figure, for whom absolutely everything was an opportunity for spin. His gaucho clothes, his high rhetorical manner, his refusal of payment for fighting, his habit of withdrawing from public view for long periods, even his "skill in producing displays of prodigious courage" (risking his life, she means), were all calculated P.R. ploys. His humble life style was "deliberate and staged," and his remote island retreat served to hide "less attractive aspects of his private life and personality"; to wit, that he was a "lascivious older man." Riall eventually asks, "How special was Garibaldi?" That, she says, "is an especially tricky question to answer." But, basically, the answer is not at all. "We no longer believe in 'Great Men,' " she reminds us.

Much is at stake here. Men killed and went to their deaths for an ideal of national unity that came to be personified in Garibaldi. Present-day Italy was born from their blood. Are we to think of those men as victims of a clever propaganda campaign? Do we think the same about those who are killing and dying for national causes today, or about the founders of our own national communities?

Having deployed a vocabulary that constantly suggests falsification, Riall makes no attempt to establish "the truth" about Garibaldi. To do so, she tells us on the last page of her overlong book, would be "to miss completely the point about his life," which was one where "image and reality were effectively indistinguishable." Why insist, then, on the notion that the man was inauthentic, as if he would rather have been wearing a dinner jacket in downtown Turin than a poncho on lonely Caprera? And is there really no distinction to be made between obviously mendacious propaganda campaigns, such as the papal pamphlets telling stories of Garibaldi atrocities, and the letters home from Garibaldi's volunteers in Sicily, all bubbling with idealism and excitement, of which Riall ungenerously remarks, "The epistolary evidence suggests a general consensus to construct . . . an exemplary Risorgimento narrative." Why not compare, at least in passing, the cult that grew up around Garibaldi with, say, that which later supported Mussolini, where the gap between rhetoric and reality was all too evident?

Riall is at her best when she looks at Garibaldi's career after unification. Unlike most historians, she takes his later activities and ideas seriously and is convincing about his long-term influence on Italian politics. But on the whole her book is bound to be dull, because she is averse to examining what actually happened. She offers not one close account of the many battles when Garibaldi's decisions did affect the course of history. She has nothing to say about the passions that moved him. She is deeply suspicious of any expression of collective excitement, seemingly embarrassed by accounts of his magnetic eyes and his seductive voice. Everything must be deprived of its intensity and unmasked as self-serving or shown to be appropriated from second-rate fiction or popular illustrations, as if there weren't always a constant back-and-forth between invented narrative and the lives that people create for themselves.

When you survey the current international situation, and the fanaticism, brutality, and sheer ugliness of some forms of insurgency, you can guess why Riall feels as she does. We must be skeptical, she seems to be saying, of heroism and its apparatus, for these are tools in the hands of those who seek, with callous disregard for human life, to manipulate our collective destiny. All the same, it might have been timely to dwell on the merits of an insurgent who did not use torture, suicide attacks, or indiscriminate killing, who did not want to enslave people to a creed or a regime, whose image, however carefully cultivated, encouraged people to believe in the possibility of independent thought and action, and who, having achieved power by conquest, handed over all his gains, as promised, without any desire for personal advancement.

Riall dismisses Garibaldi's memoirs as "undeniably badly written." Well, I deny it. They are exciting and give a powerful sense of the confusion surrounding political and military events during the Risorgimento. "A tree is judged by the quality of the fruit it bears, and individuals are judged by the benefits they can bestow on their fellow human beings," Garibaldi remarks at one point. "Being born, existing, eating and drinking, and dying—insects do all this as well. In times like those in 1860 in southern Italy men are truly alive and their lives are in the service of others. This is the real life of the soul!"

One imagines the young men and women who sit in Professor Riall's classes at the University of London. One wonders if she finishes her lectures as she does the chapters of this book, with a section headed "Conclusion," in which she wearily repeats what was said in the previous pages, in case you weren't paying attention. Perhaps, in the busy city outside the window, there is a call to arms, there are people urging us to take up a struggle. Perhaps a young man's head lifts. He wants to be involved in the world. Should he answer the call? Should he submit to the enchantment of the embattled community? Is the struggle ugly? Is it beautiful? Is it worth a life? These questions are not resolved by deciding that all communication is propaganda. ♦

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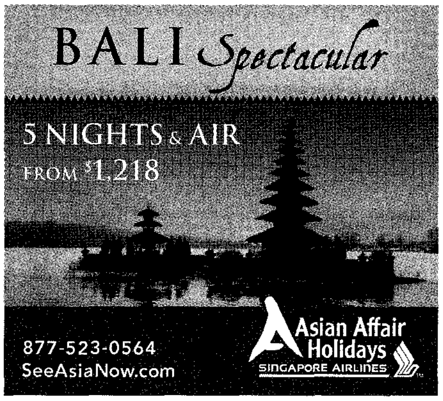

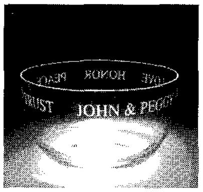

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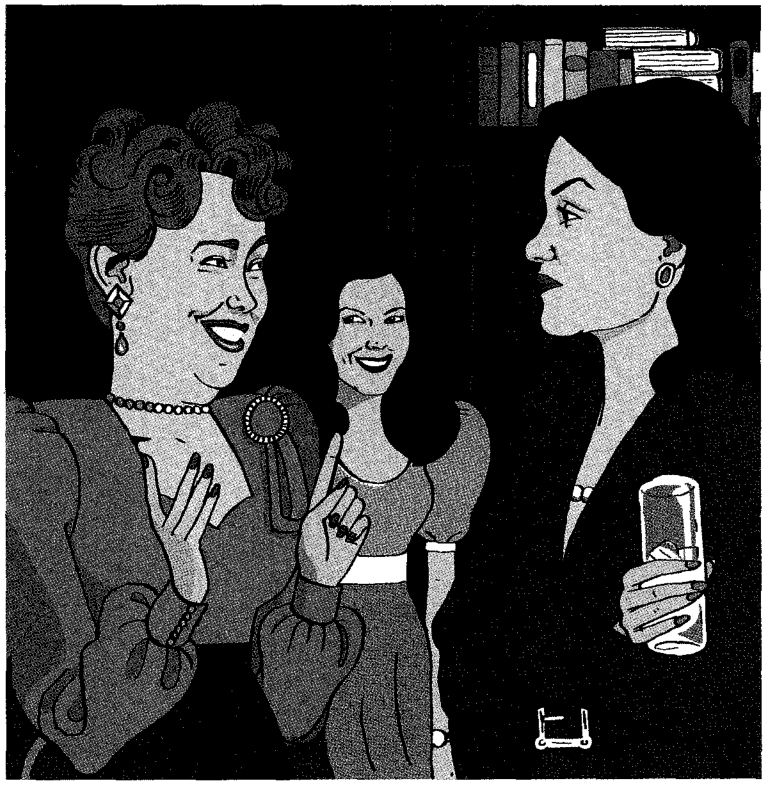
THE THEATRE

GIRL TALK

Old love and young love.

BY HILTON ALS

New York—that "savage's romance," as the poet Marianne Moore described it—occupies such a peculiar, powerful place in the world's imagination that one marvels at those writers who are brave enough to take it on as a subject. But there it is, in stories and plays and essays, from Melville's "Bartleby" to Joan Didion's "Goodbye to All That"—fragmentary works that offer no real conclusions about the romance that most of New York's denizens have with their town. "City of night like you wouldn't believe, absolutely Asphalt Jungle" is how Michael Herr speaks of the island of Manhattan, in his 1977 essay "The Hook." He goes on, "So much culture, such bad manners. . . . Sooner or later it'll bring you to your knees, swear to God."



Harriet Harris, Diane Davis, and Margaret Colin in "Old Acquaintance."

PATRICK LONG

The energy of Herr's nervous prose is light-years away from the world that the British-born playwright John Van Druten (1901-1957) created in his New York-based plays, among them his 1940 hit, "Old Acquaintance" (now in revival in a Roundabout production at the American Airlines Theatre, under the direction of Michael Wilson). Set alternately in Greenwich Village and on Park Avenue, "Old Acquaintance" is a kind of precursor to the drawing-room shenanigans of such contemporary dramatists as Richard Greenberg and Sarah Ruhl. But whereas those playwrights try to fold a Herr-like anxiety and seriousness into their froth, Van Druten had no such pretensions. He kept a steady grip on his superficial point of view. In his Manhattan, ladies wore hats and gloves and had three Martinis at lunch, and no one was ever less than sophisticated.

Katherine Markham (Margaret Colin) is a struggling writer who lives in a narrow, two-story maisonette on Washington Square. She has lovers, the latest being Rudd Kendall (Corey Stoll). Rudd, who is Katherine's junior by some years, works in publishing. You get the picture: neither of the lovers has much money. But Katherine has her artistic integrity—at least, Deirdre (Diane Davis) seems to think so. Deirdre is a silly but bright débutante, who lives in relative luxury in Pelham, just outside the city. She doesn't like to hang around at home very much, mostly because she has to share the house with her mother, Mildred Watson Drake (Harriet Harris), who is Katherine's old school chum. Mildred writes books, too, a lot of them, but they're trashy romances; she doesn't suffer for her art as much as she dresses for it. Deirdre prefers Katherine's company, and this fact gets on Mildred's nerves. When Mildred arrives at Katherine's flat to let her errant daughter know that she's taken an apartment in town just to please her, she's all powder and rancor: she wants to win Deirdre back, and she'll do whatever she can to get Katherine out of the way.

Van Druten's ladies don't fight—not physically. Instead, as Mildred's red curls jiggle, so does her mind: she loves her friend, but only when her jealousy permits her to; the rest of the time, she resonates with barely contained fury. Mildred is in a state for most of this relatively short three-act play. In Act II, we see her in her astonishingly vulgar pied-à-terre. (The excellent stage design is by Alexander Dodge.) She's wearing a gold-and-white hostess gown, the better to reclaim her former husband, Preston (Stephen Bogardus), who confesses, during their conversation, that it was Katherine who really helped him to stay in the marriage—for as long as he could stand it. Duped again, Mildred retires for a moment with a bottle of J&B. How can Katherine be so good, and yet so poor? Despite Mildred's resentments—we love her for never winning—Katherine slogs on with their friendship. When Deirdre asks her why, she explains that if she gave up on Mildred it would mean giving up on someone who has known her since she was a girl. In Katherine's principled universe, history counts for something.

That universe would be less fun altogether without Harriet Harris. She plays her part with an insouciance that well befits this slight, enjoyable work, in which the brilliant costuming, by David C. Woolard, means as much to us as the characters. Because the play is a comedy, Van Druten relies on the accumulation of clichés, some of which he then explodes. But he knows enough about audiences to give them a little fantasy, too. If you work hard at what you do, he seems to say, you, too, can have a maid or a fur coat. The fantasy is brief. It means no harm.

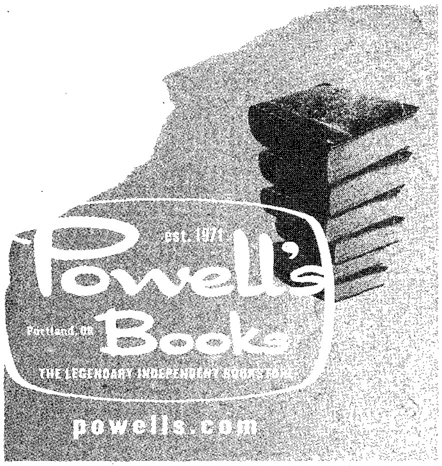
The night I went to see "Romeo and Juliet" (a Public Theatre production, at the Delacorte), New York had settled into summer. The air was fetid, the moon phosphorescent. An old woman slowly pushed a shopping cart up Broadway as though she were rolling a stone up a mountain, a retail-minded Sisyphus. Young men in seersucker suits with vaguely damp hair seemed to be gripped less by desire for the scantily clad women who passed them on Columbus Avenue than by the heat that rose off the sidewalks crowded with booksellers, café-dwellers, and the homeless. Over on Central Park West, not far from the entrance to the theatre, a young woman stood idly by, claiming nearly everyone's attention. She was long-legged, with jet-black hair, and skin as white as a camellia. The young woman was not wilting in the heat; in fact, she seemed to be energized by it. For just a moment, people on their way to the Delacorte were reminded of youth's ability to nourish itself with whatever it is given.

Similarly, Lauren Ambrose's Juliet emits the excitement of being—and of all that her being incurs, pleasant or painful. Waiting for news of her beloved Romeo (Oscar Isaac), Juliet pays little mind to the age-old feud between her family, the Capulets, and his, the Montagues: that's old news; her love is new. Why can't the world keep up with her meteoric feelings, which, generally, short-circuit somewhere between sense and sensibility? Juliet addresses her adolescent impatience—her desire to know and to feel everything all at once—less to her parents than to her nurse (Camryn Manheim), who is her confidante, bawdy sex educator, and go-between. Dressed in white, her long red hair falling like layers of confection around her face, Juliet declares her annoyance: "Had she affections and warm youthful blood, / She would be as swift in motion as a ball . . . / But old folks, many feign as they were dead, / Unwieldy, slow, heavy, and pale as lead." Of course, what Juliet is complaining about is habit. She'll never fall into that trap, nor will she succumb to that other adult tendency: to wage wars over nothing when the real riches of life are affection, honor, and trust.

When Nurse finally arrives with the news that Romeo will meet Juliet, Manheim engages in so much showy foolishness—exaggerated moaning and groaning about her aches and pains—that you wonder how Ambrose puts up with it, or why the director, Michael Greif, indulged it. Of course, Nurse belongs to the Mistress Quickly canon of Shakespeare's gaudy house mistresses, who create bedlam and order all at once; she is meant to be the sandpaper to her young charge's silk. But Manheim here is less comic relief than cosmic bore; she performs the part like a drunk, sucking all the air out of the room before she even hits the bar.

She's especially irritating because she distracts from Ambrose's performance. Before seeing the show, I did not think that it was possible for an actress to discover anything new in the role of Juliet. But Ambrose finds so many colors to unfurl that you wonder if Shakespeare himself handed her some new ideas on the sly. You keep checking the text to see if she's improvising. She isn't, of course. Ambrose revels in the language she's been given. And, because she understands the poetry of it, she frees herself to be physical: she's the goofiest Juliet imaginable, a bride who is unmindful of hearth and home; she views love as her castle.

In her pairing with Isaac, she reveals, too, the deep solipsism at the heart of most romantic love. Isaac is adequate as Romeo—he plays him as a kind of happy Hamlet—but he ends up seeming a bit of a drip, the kind of guy you want to hurry off the phone. In the first act, Isaac plays off Christopher Evan Welch's Mercutio. (Their relationship is the male equivalent of Manheim and Ambrose's.) Too bad that Welch, like Manheim, is so hammy. While Ambrose's performance is born of the complexity and truth one finds in nature, Manheim, Welch, and Isaac's work feels as synthetic as the buildings we have to look past in order to glimpse the stars. ♦



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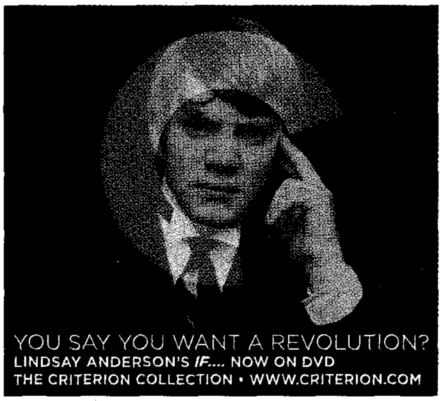
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THE CURRENT CINEMA

BATTLE SCARS

"Transformers" and "Rescue Dawn."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The opening scene of Michael Bay's "Transformers" takes place in deep space. Out of the darkness comes a voice that is deeper still. It makes Barry White sound like a countertenor, and this is what it says: "Before time began, there was the Cube." Hello? Mr. Rubik?

The film that ensues is acrylically bright, and the only way to match its median sound level would be to blow up a trombone factory, yet what descended on me in that first scene was a wintry pall of mystification. It never really lifted, but then I never collected small, twisted pieces of vehicular weaponry in the mid-nineteen-eighties, or watched the animated TV series that followed, and thus it is not to me that Bay is exposing his innermost soul. Transformers, as any parent who has ever bruised a heel on Bonecrusher can tell you, were a line of toys that could, given sufficient wrenching, be turned from cars and planes into robots and back again. Nowadays, we would call this recycling, but at the climax of the Cold War it felt more like eternal readiness. You could sit moodily in the back of your parents' Pontiac Sunbird and imagine cruise missiles bursting out of the headlamps.

Now these delightful objets d'art have a movie to themselves. We should not be surprised. Long ago, when the impact of "Star Wars" was beefed up by a line of merchandise, some of us noticed that the five-inch Lukes and Leias possessed a depth and mobility that was denied to their onscreen counterparts, and, decades later, we have reached the reductio ad absurdum of that rivalry: rather than spin the toys off from the movie, why not build the movie from the toys? "Transformers" is not the first effort in this direction; I distinctly remember finding a couchful of children enraptured by a DVD of "Barbie of Swan Lake" and realizing that Ingmar Bergman's "Persona" had not, after all, signalled the final disintegration of human personality. Bay's movie, however—as befits the bringer of "The Rock," "Armageddon," and "Pearl Harbor"—is the grandest proof so far that, when it comes to movie characterization, flesh and blood have had their chance. From here on, it's up to metal and plastic.

There are two types of Transformers: the Autobots, who are fine, upstanding citizens in pretty colors, and the Decepticons, most of whom are mean, vengeful, and beige. The quarrel between the two sides began on their home planet. For the purposes of the movie, however, they duke it out on ours. One of the Decepticons disguises itself as a helicopter and trashes an American military base in Qatar; another pretends to be a boom box (who still has one of *those*?) and stows away on Air Force One. Their target is a slender naïf named Sam Witwicky (Shia LaBeouf), a teen-ager who happens to hold the key to the universe or some such useless item. Fortunately, his car, a trusty yellow Camaro, is in fact a saintly Autobot that has been sent to protect him. This shield-the-kid plot is pilfered from "Terminator 2," and there are matching nods to "Godzilla" and the recent "King Kong," but, if you really want to know what "Transformers" feels like, think of a hundred-and-thirty-five-minute, hundred-and-fifty-million-dollar retread of "Herbie Goes Bananas."

The Autobot Optimus Prime in Michael Bay's new movie.

JOHN RITTER

The spectacle of life and feeling being vested in the inanimate is as old as cinema itself, and you could argue that it peaked early, in 1927, with the slowly opening eyes of the robot in "Metropolis." The latter was a woman, which is more than "Transformers" can muster—there's not a Femitron, or what Bay would presumably call a Chickibot, in sight, and we are left to wonder how, why, and via what stimulation his mounds of scrap metal might reproduce. "These things just don't die," a soldier says, which raises the question of whether they ever just live. Certainly, the director can't decide on their level of moral sophistication; early on, they seem merely aggressive and willful, not unlike a real Camaro, but then suddenly the Autobots—led by Optimus Prime, whose name suggests an ambitious, moist-palmed young curate out of Trollope—begin gushing sermons like oil. "Freedom is the right of all sentient beings," Optimus declares, shortly before he and Megatron, his opposite number, start cartwheeling through major conurbations. Personally, I tend to feel less, not more, sentient when a pair of battling robots lands on my desk, but that's just me.

In previous movies, Michael Bay

dabbled wearily in *Homo sapiens*. At last he has summoned the courage to admit that he has an exclusive crush on machines, and I congratulate him on creating, in "Transformers," his first truly honest work of art. Not that he needs my plaudits; as a passerby exclaims in the midst of the film, "This is easily a hundred times cooler than 'Armageddon'!" To be proud of your achievement is one thing, but to plant film critics inside your movie and review it favorably as you go along: that takes genius. Where it leaves real critics—rusty old Concepticons, with failing firepower—I hate to think.

What does Michael Bay have in common with Werner Herzog? What links the showman behind "Transformers" with the maker of "Fitzcarraldo," "Aguirre, Wrath of God," and other excursions into savagery and silence? The answer lies in a charge that Herzog has levelled at himself: "I am someone who takes everything very literally. I simply do not understand irony." Neither man is embarrassed by this lack, but, while it has helped to unbridle Bay and send him galloping into bombast, Herzog has been left to browse among the eccentrics and daydreamers who populate his films. To him, indeed, they are the opposite of eccentric; Kaspar Hauser, the hero of "Every Man for Himself and God Against All" (1974), is raised like a beast in a stall, and yet, as the director says, "*he* is at the center."

Such relish of extremity, of what Herzog calls "radical dignity," led him to Dieter Dengler, a fellow-German. Born in 1938, four years before Herzog, Dengler grew up during the Second World War, then emigrated to America at the age of eighteen. He went to college, became an American citizen, joined the Navy as a pilot, and was shot down over Laos on his first mission, in 1966. He was caught, tortured, and imprisoned in a jungle camp for several months; after a gunfight, he and other prisoners escaped. Conditions in the jungle were, if anything, more hostile than in the camp, and it was only by chance that Dengler was spotted by an American pilot, picked up, and returned to safety.

Herzog is so struck by the story that he has told it twice: first, ten years ago, in a documentary called "Little Dieter Needs to Fly," and now in "Rescue Dawn," a feature film. In the documentary, Herzog visited Dengler in California, filmed him in his home town in the Black Forest, and took him back to the jungle, inviting the hero to describe his ordeal afresh. (Not for the first time, the director's obsessive method skirted the sadistic.) In "Rescue Dawn," Dengler is played by Christian Bale; the film narrows its focus to the events of 1966, starting with the pre-flight briefing on board the U.S.S. Ranger, hauling us through his capture and breakout, and ending up back on the ship.

That ending is triumphant, with Dengler surrounded and cheered by his comrades. This is accurate enough—the man himself confirmed it in the documentary—and yet nobody watching the freeze-frame of Bale's grin, and hearing the thudding surge of the musical score, would guess for a second that this is a Werner Herzog film. I wouldn't go so far as to call it a Michael Bay moment, but in its mood—the solid pomp of emotional relief—it slides into the groove of "Uncommon Valor," "Behind Enemy Lines," and other mainstream parables of men lost and found. Most of Herzog's previous films were made by his own production company; this one was made partly by Top Gun Productions. What is going on?

The issue, I suspect, is one not of Herzog selling out but of Hollywood wanting to buy in, and Bale duly serves up a chipper portrait of courage under pressure, remaining fresh-faced even as his cheeks wither to a monkish gauntness. Yet his dramatized sufferings, however intense, pale beside the real ones recounted by Dengler—a middle-aged survivor, his courtesy and boyishness undimmed—in "Little Dieter Needs to Fly." Food was the strongest leitmotif, as he remembered his mother stripping wallpaper from the ruins of German houses (she boiled it up, for the nutrients in the glue) or showed us his own stash of emergency rations hidden under the floorboards in California. Like Herzog, Dengler was seized by the belief that civilization can falter and split at any time, leaving us to slip through the cracks: a dread that we rarely get from "Rescue Dawn," which offers its own vision of deprivation—Dengler munching a dish of live worms—but doesn't linger long enough, even mid-jungle, to leave us in the kind of directionless trance that was conjured by "Aguirre" and "Every Man for Himself." There is honor, boldness, and grip in the new movie, but other directors can deliver those. Werner Herzog is the last great hallucinator in cinema, so why break the spell? ♦

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VOLUME LXXXIII, NO. 19, July 9 & 16, 2007. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: February 19 & 26, June 11 & 18, July 9 & 16, September 3 & 10, and December 24 & 31) by Condé Nast Publications, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: The Condé Nast Building, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. Louis Cona, vice-president and publisher; Jamie Engel, associate publisher; Alatia Bradley, advertising director; Karen Quinn-Panzer, advertising director; Judy Safir, director of finance and business operations; Daniella Wells, associate publisher of creative services and marketing; Jacqueline Cinguina, executive director of marketing and integrated strategy; Steven Porter, executive creative director; Damian Slattery, executive director of creative services; Lynn Oberlander, general counsel. Condé Nast Publications: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman; Charles H. Townsend, president and C.E.O.; John W. Bellando, executive vice-president and C.O.O.; Debi Chirichella Sabino, senior vice-president and C.F.O.; Jill Bright, executive vice-president/human resources. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40644503. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001. Canada Post: return undeliverable Canadian addresses to P.O. Box 874, Station Main, Markham, ON L3P 8L4.

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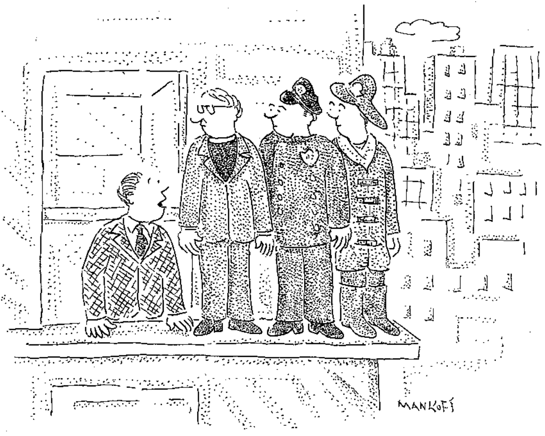
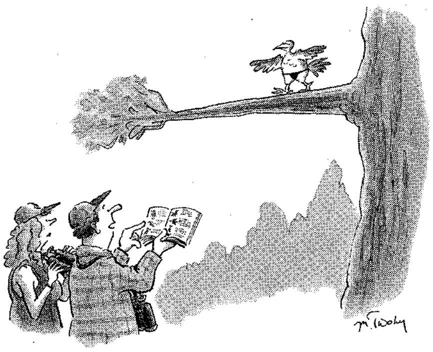
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Tom Cheney, must be received by Sunday, July 15th. Finalists in the June 25th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the July 30th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Excuse me—does this joke need a lawyer?"
Eric Friedenwald-Fishman, Portland, Ore.



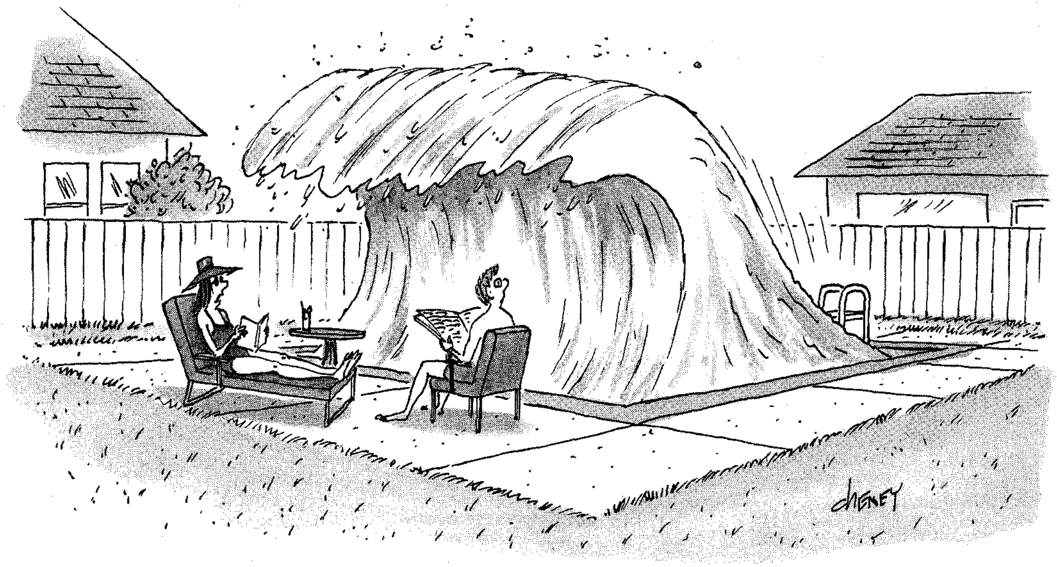
THE FINALISTS

"It's a thongbird."
Sandy Sommer, St. Louis, Mo.

"The Speedo would suggest that he's not native to Vermont."
Melissa Muntyan, Tampa, Fla.

"Honey, do you have any dollar bills?"
Kester Wise, San Francisco, Calif.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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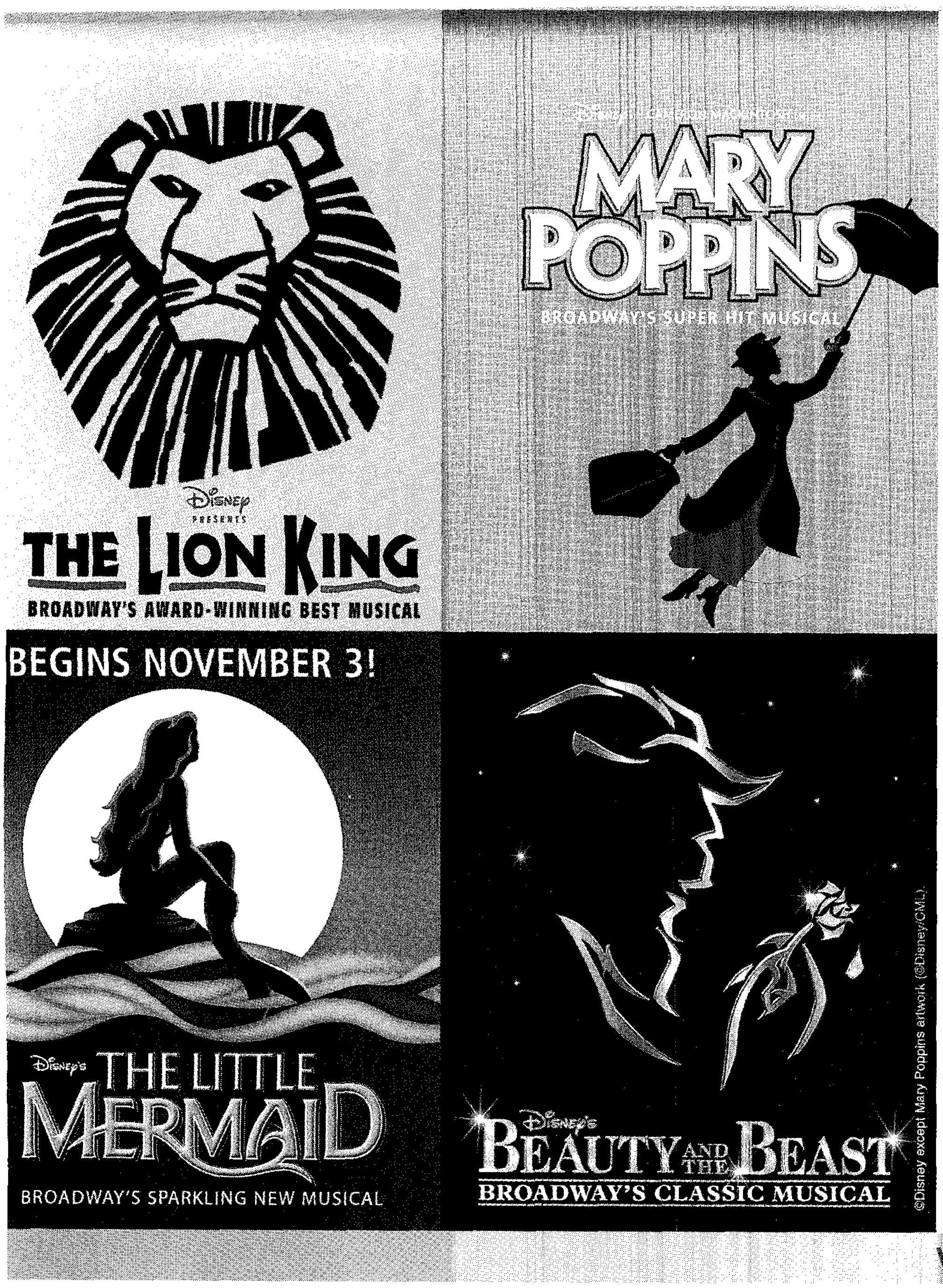
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